Betrayal in India

D. F. Karaka

D. F. KARAKA

is editor of *The Current*—a highly polemical magazine (described as independent, non-party and anti-"communal") which he started on September 28th 1949, after resigning from the Editorship of *March*. The latter had made its mark with its front-page article "The People say Congress Worse than the British".

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Mr. Karaka is the author of some dozen books, published in Britain, the United States and India. The best known of these is perhaps *I GO WEST*, published in 1938. Mr. Harold Nicolson wrote of it in the "Daily Telegraph":

> "Mr. Karaka will undoubtedly be a disturbance in this country; but the right kind of disturbance."

Mr. Tom Clarke wrote:

> "It is a poignant book, brilliantly written. . . . It illuminates for me, as never before, the contradictions of the social scenes among Indians in India."

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by

D. F. KARAKA

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To

THE SHRINE

AT WHICH I WORSHIP—A SIMPLE SHRINE TO WHICH THE POOR AND THE NEEDY, THE RICH AND THE POWERFUL, GO FOR PRAYER, AND WHERE I TOO HAVE FOUND STRENGTH AND COURAGE WHEN ALL ELSE SEEMED LOST

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I NEVER THOUGHT A day would come when I would see my people and my country free; yet freedom came.

I never thought a day would come so soon after their liberation when these same people would feel betrayed. Yet that day has also come, and by a strange combination of circumstances it falls on me to tell the story of that betrayal.

The writing of this book has involved much research and much time has been spent in assimilating the facts, figures, angles and opinions that have come to me. It has not been easy to write such a book as this while doing a full-time job as an editor, perpetually watched by the government.

I have done it more easily because of the many friends who have allowed me access to their findings and allowed me sometimes even to use their words. To them my grateful thanks are due.

There are other debts of gratitude which I find difficult to express in words. They are owed to all those who have helped me in my most difficult days.

D. F. KARAKA.

12, CARMICHAEL ROAD,
BOMBAY, INDIA.

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I

DRESS REHEARSAL

All was quiet in the main thoroughfare, deserted except for steel-helmeted policemen in dark blue, yellow-braided uniforms, their pants tucked in like plus-fours. They stood in groups of three and four at intervals along the road. Some leant against the closed doors of a shop, their chins resting on crossed hands atop a thick bamboo stick. On their steel helmets were painted the initials B.C.P., Bombay City Police. On their feet they wore black shiny *chappals*, which were sandals and part of their uniform. Their legs were bare and brown. Now and again they yawned, for it was a warm summer day.

On an old deck-chair with faded stripes sprawled an Anglo-Indian sub-inspector of police. Khaki-clad, his legs were lazily crossed; his white sola topee with its service yellow stripes was drawn well over his eyes, Next to him two Indian soldiers in khaki-green were squatted on the kerb. On their arms flashed the red eagle of the Fourth Indian Division. In front of them was a machine-gun with the tracer in position, ready for firing. From the fox-holes of Keren, Tobruk and Benghazi these Indian soldiers had once fought the Germans. Now they were entrusted with the task of keeping their countrymen in order.

The sun still beat strongly. It was afternoon and normally a busy time of the day. But there was no sign of business being conducted, nor any activity nor even movement. At rare intervals an armoured car clanked down the street. A twenty-four hour curfew was in force.

The asphalt stretch, which on a normal working day would be obscured by a sea of humanity, stood out in the surrounding bareness. The shining steel tramlines which ran parallel along the middle of the road, curving at the far end where the road swung right, accentuated the bare grey appearance.

The thoroughfare appeared clean, polished and quiet. No one could notice, unless they looked very closely, the red

blood spots on that grey asphalt. They had dried up and congealed. The man who had lain there that morning beside a pool of fresh blood, his intestines falling out of his naked, dark brown abdomen, his mouth gaping wide, his eyes in a vacant stare, was no longer there. His body now lay in a morgue, waiting to be identified.

From the three-storeyed building opposite the policemen two eyes could be seen peering through the venetians of a window on the first floor. In the silence the unfastening of a bolt was heard.

The armed law stiffened to attention. The two soldiers moved closer to the Bren, one of them moving his finger to the trigger and pointing the nozzle of the gun at the window on the first floor. The white sola topee of the sub-inspector was lifted back into place.

There was a tense moment. Slowly the window opened and a man's face appeared. He was chewing *pan*. He looked at the policeman for a while, as he twirled the betel-nut in his mouth. Calmly he spat the red juice on to the pavement below. Then he closed the window gently again as if that was all he had really meant to do.

The sub-inspector changed the position of his legs, brought his hat down over his eyes, stretched his arms and yawned once again. The two soldiers near the gun looked at each other with relief.

The next day the curfew was relaxed.

At first the people hesitated to open their front doors, but gradually they could be seen slipping out to do an errand and returning to their homes as stealthily again.

The tempo of the thoroughfare quickened as men walked with short, quick steps, their hearts beating a heavy pit-pat, their eyes eager and watchful. The familiar trams were plodding their way over the asphalt stretch, the drivers whacking at the foot-bells to keep people off the lines. Now and again a car would drive past, and now and again a horse and carriage could be seen plying for fare.

As the first morning hours passed without any important incident, more people appeared in the streets with renewed confidence that the worst was over. By noon the life of the thoroughfare would resume its normal shape. The shops which had been closed for two or three days would open,

perhaps just a door, hoping to transact what little business they could.

Suddenly the hum of the street died down and out of the silence could be heard the shouts of policemen calling upon the people to stop a man who was running through the crowd, knife in hand. But the people merely made way for the murderer, too afraid to cross his path. A shot or two rang out from the police squad but by then the assassin had slipped into a gully off the main thoroughfare.

The groans of a dying man lying in the middle of the road with blood streaming out of his wound were clearly heard. The police had now gathered around him and the passers-by stopped to look on. Then an ambulance whisked down the road, collected the victim and drove away. The people ran back into their homes and shut their doors again.

During the year before independence this was a frequent scene in the cities of India. The civil war was on, though few were aware of it.

* * * * *

On June 3rd, 1947, Lord Louis Mountbatten, Viceroy and Governor-General of India, went to the microphone and made a declaration on behalf of the British government. It was the answer to the Indian cry of "Quit India".

So freedom was announced to my people, as easily as that.

Two weeks later, in a bottle-green 1935 Chevrolet driven by a weatherbeaten Moslem taxidriver, I rattled down the long drive of Viceroy's House, New Delhi, to see the man who had taken part in all the behind-the-curtain discussions that led to that declaration. His name was Lord Ismay.

Past a handful of turbaned flunkeys in their long, "new-look" red and gold-crested uniforms, I was escorted to the offices of the various secretaries and attachés. Then on again through various corridors and conference rooms on whose walls hung portraits of Viceroys and Vicereines long since dead till I was shown into an oak-panelled study, the office of Lord Ismay.

Ismay rose from the desk at which he had been working and stretched out a friendly paw.

General Lord Ismay, D.S.O., K.C.B., C.H., etc., etc., typified the British ruling class. He had an impressive presence, a fine military bearing, his features were strong and rugged. He was an odd mixture of soldier, aristocrat, bulldog and gentleman. His blond, bushy eyebrows were like those of the American labour leader, John L. Lewis. His face was full of character, round and Churchillian in its emphasis. He wore a dark brown civilian suit that morning, a beige silk shirt and a knitted tie. He looked a perfect English gentleman, as tailored by Hawes and Curtis.

Ismay had come to India as adviser to Mountbatten during the momentous talks that preceded the decision to partition and quit India. He was a Tory in politics, a personal friend of Winston Churchill and a General in the British Army. He belonged to the generation of Englishmen who believed in the Empire and all its dignity but who were also aware that the British could no longer hold on to their Empire in the East by force of arms. In the face of that realization he was now getting ready to quit that imperial scene with grace.

It was at this interview with Lord Ismay that I understood how Britain, who had held out so long against our national aspirations, had suddenly and so readily agreed to give up her 150-year-old domination and quit the Indian scene.

The main reason which appears to have prompted this decision could be traced to the change that had come over the British people as a result of the war. While Adolf Hitler perpetrated many atrocities I felt he had also unconsciously driven the British to realize yet more forcibly how much freedom could mean to a people. The silent revolution wrought by the early defeats of the war which gave to Britain a cohesive, classless unity by which alone she survived the Nazi onslaught was reflected not only in her home affairs but also in her dealings with other peoples of the world. It was as a result of this revolution that the Socialists were swept into power in Britain and the British working class got the chance of a fair share in the government of the country. It was also a result of this silent revolution that, without further struggle, the Indian was conceded his right to govern his country.

This changed British mood was best expressed by the First Lord of the Admiralty, the Rt. Hon. A. V. Alexander, who said in the House of Commons: "We offer India independence and freedom because it is our own birthright and because it is the birthright we desire to accord to men and women in all parts of the world."

The questions, therefore, of whether India was ready to govern herself or not were no longer relevant in terms of this new outlook which ranked freedom and democracy above all practical considerations. Whatever the practical considerations and whatever apprehensions one may have felt about the Indians' ability to govern, independence could not have been delayed without risk of serious repercussions in my country. Ours had by then become a unified demand pressed for by every section of Indian opinion, even including the princes. The only point on which the country was divided was: Should power be transferred to the people as a whole leaving it to them to settle the issue of partition, or should the country be partitioned by the British and power transferred to two newly-created and separate dominions?

The majority said: "Quit"; the Moslem minority said: "Divide and quit". But no section of the Indian people, Hindu or Moslem or any other, wanted the British domination to continue. That was crystal clear.

Ismay was of the opinion that, among other factors, the part played by the Indian soldier in this war had made a profound impression on British public opinion and influenced it to yield to India's demand.

As the die of our independence had by then already been cast, that hour and a quarter with Lord Ismay was important more as a psychological study of the British character than a pointer to future political moves. It made me understand how the British were able to make an enforced retreat, as at Dunkirk, appear a graceful withdrawal.

Ismay did not seem to favour partition. As a soldier he felt it most when it came to dividing the army. "I told Jinnah", he said, "the army had but one heart, one pair of lungs and one mind." But Jinnah did not yield. At one time further discussions between the three parties — the British, the Congress and the Moslem League—appeared

futile and hopeless. "Then the idea of creating two sovereign dominions came up. It seemed the only way out."

Ismay had come here to perform a thankless job. It was a British political maxim that to send a man on a political mission to India was the best way to damn his prospects in Britain. A long line of distinguished men had come to us before Mountbatten and Ismay. Very few had survived the expedition. Even so, when Lord Ismay was approached he did not shirk the prospect of failure. He came against Winston Churchill's better judgement, for Churchill had said to him, "I should not go if I were you." Ismay felt it was a call he had to answer.

That was the spirit in which this Englishman came to India and played an unrecorded and unostentatious part in the most vital decision that has been made in my country in my generation. To Mountbatten's lead, Ismay played a brilliant supporting role. He dispelled for me the suspicion which many Indians harboured that the Englishman, pushed out of India, was siding with Jinnah and the Moslems in order to get even with us.

Here was a man more convinced than I that my country would have a future and that its people were now on the right path to democracy and freedom and all those glorious ideals for which they had fought for over a quarter of a century. I did not share that conviction, for I was afraid of men changing when power came into their hands.

As I left him and walked back through the long vista of corridors, I looked up once more at the pictures that hung from the walls. There was a mustiness about that big house around which Lutyens built the city of New Delhi. There was also a hollowness about the place and the tread of my feet echoed in the empty rooms. It looked as though someone was leaving.

I stopped and turned to the Indian flunkey escorting me through the maze. "What does this *swaraj* mean to you?" I asked him. He giggled shyly and said he did not know. Then he ventured: "Gandhiji will probably come here to live."

"Would you like that?" I asked him, for he had lived there through many Viceroyalties.

He was not sure. "I don't think I'll get so much pay. And

my uniform—that may have to go. *Khaddar* uniforms don't look good. The British made the best uniforms. My golden *pugree* is much better for a sepoy than a Congress topee."

He walked up to the taxi with me, *salaamed* me with a sheepish grin on his face, looked round to see whether anyone was watching, and whispered: "*Bakshish* for freedom?"

First things first even in free India, I thought to myself. I gave him a rupee.

* * * * *

One of the best-informed newspapermen in New Delhi at that time was Shiva Rao, correspondent of the orthodox *Hindu* of Madras and the staid *Manchester Guardian*. He also wrote for the American *Nation*. He was the elder brother of Sir Benegal Rama Rao, who was for some time our ambassador at Washington. Shiva Rao had also been our delegate to the United Nations in Paris.

I saw Shiva Rao more than once. In his quiet way he told me how the Congress party in the Central government gradually came to realize that they had allowed the Moslem League to get too strong a foothold in the administration. The Congress-Moslem League coalition had not worked in a team-spirit. The deadlock which the Moslems created within the administration was a triumph of political strategy. And in their desire to placate the Moslems the Congress had let the administration become paralysed from within.

The sabotage was so effective that various government departments headed by Congressmen were issued with a directive urging the departmental heads "to prevent their departments from rusting".

The situation was yet more aggravated by the realization that the country would be faced with a serious economic crisis if immediate measures were not taken to undo the damage done by this sabotage. Congress cabinet ministers who handled the folios of food and industries were alarmed at the statistics with which they were confronted. There was a food shortage of over 45,000 tons and a cloth shortage of 800,000 yards.

But the desire to yield to Jinnah's demand for partition

was more fundamental than a difference of opinion in government. The Moslem mind had become irreconcilable to compromise. The vision of a Moslem homeland had taken too firm a root in the Moslem mind. Jinnah's young lieutenants had become religious fanatics, believing in the doctrine that the end justifies the means.

We were lunching at the time in the large dining room of the Hotel Imperial, when a curly-haired, handsome, burly young Moslem in his thirties, dressed in a thin muslin north-Indian shirt and balloon pyjamas, walked into the room. An amber cigarette holder dangled from his mouth and he looked around him with the air of a spoilt playboy.

"There is one of them," Shiva Rao said, pointing to the curly-haired young man.

Behind the young man was a squad of four hefty Pathans, wearing their traditional dress, with exaggerated turbans domed with gold brocade and laced pyjamas made of yards and yards of cloth. They looked like musketeers of the days of the silent films. Their greased moustaches twirled to a Casanova point.

This curly-headed boy was Quazi Mohamed Issa, a landlord of Quetta.

"Last year", Shiva Rao said, "this Issa made a speech at the Anglo-Arabic college here in Delhi. I was there and heard him speak. He made a vicious attack on those Moslems who had joined the Congress and threatened them."

"In what way?" I asked.

"The words he used were 'We give ten days to these heretics to return to the fold or else they will be dealt with as traitors under the Koranic law'."

Shiva Rao said that at the end of the meeting an American correspondent, Alfred Wagg III, went up to Issa and chatted with him. Issa is said to have told Wagg that he was wasting his time in New Delhi. If Wagg wanted a really hot story he should go immediately to Calcutta. He would see "the fireworks" there.

This incident is alleged to have occurred in the first week of August 1946 and within a week there took place in Calcutta, which was then governed by a Moslem League ministry, the most unprecedented scenes of lawlessness. The

British-controlled newspaper *The Statesman* called it a "*jehad*", a holy war.

And Alfred Wagg III was there—in Calcutta—to cover the story. Wagg has told me this story is true. On the other hand Issa has flatly denied it to me.

What happened in Calcutta in August 1946 is best described by *The Statesman* which was on the spot to make this observation.

"This is not a riot. It needs a word found in mediæval history, a fury. Yet a fury sounds spontaneous, and there must have been some preparation and organization to set this fury on its way. . . . It has been three days of unprecedented, concentrated, Indian civil war."

Calcutta was followed by Noakhali in East Bengal where the Moslem peasants made an attempt to eliminate the Hindu minority. The males were killed; the women either kidnapped, converted or forcibly married. There was a reply to this in Bihar where the Hindus did more or less the same thing to the Moslem minority. So it spread all over the United Provinces, Punjab, Bombay. The year before independence saw a series of reprisals in which thousands of innocent people lost their lives.

To trace the origin of this civil war, one has to go back to the resolution of the All India Moslem League, which, under the guidance of its leader, the late Mr. Jinnah, rescinded the League's support of the British cabinet proposals and decided to launch a programme of *Direct Action*. Its object was to compel the acceptance of the League's demand for Pakistan. The date of this resolution was June 29th, 1946, just a little before the *jehad* (holy war) broke out in Calcutta.

It was never officially stated what *direct action* implied. Jinnah had hinted at civil war as a threat if his demand for Pakistan was not accepted, and his satellites publicly spoke of the "one hundred and one ways in which *direct action* would take shape", always emphasizing that unlike the Congress the League had never been committed to non-violence and that "Moslems knew well what they were to do".

It is now quite clear in retrospect that the Moslem League had inspired the bands of ruffians who rushed about Cal-

cutta in lorries assaulting and attacking hundreds of innocent Hindus in order to create fear and confusion.

There is also a pattern which can be traced between the fortunes of the Moslem League and the Indian political scene in the year 1946 and the outbreaks of violence in the country. Whenever the League scored a point the riots quietened down. On the other hand, whenever Mr. Jinnah or the League lost a political advantage the riots broke out with renewed fury.

The Moslems who roamed the streets of Calcutta during the Great Calcutta Killing were heard to shout that they were killing in a holy war in the name of the Prophet. Nor was this mere pretence. They really believed in the holiness of the war they waged against what their leader had called "a brute majority".

The partition of India was, therefore, not just a division of territory. It was a division of mind as well. The British prophecy that Hindus and Moslems would not be able to live together when the British had quit was soon to be fulfilled. It did not, however, convince anyone that British rule should continue. Heavy as was the price of freedom, both Hindus and Moslems were apparently prepared to pay it.

Meanwhile, the only man who was safe in the streets of Calcutta was the British soldier. It was rather odd that Tommy Atkins, who had been the target of attack in many a previous riot in our country, should now be the only person who could walk through it with any measure of safety. With typical Army discipline he sweated away in the scorching heat tidying the city, dragging out corpses from the sewers and doing all the dirtiest work that was given to him.

* * * * *

Everyone seemed to be so obsessed with the responsibility which was to come that it was almost impossible to induce any of the prominent Congress leaders to find time for an interview. Those were momentous days when arrangements were being finalized for the actual transfer of power.

Several visits to the offices of Pandit Nehru's many secretaries had resulted in the booking of half an hour with the

Pandit himself, but even that interview was cancelled at the last minute. I was just unlucky.

I succeeded, however, in inducing Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to see me. He chose the ungodly hour of 7.45 in the morning for an interview. Maulana Azad's position had become somewhat precarious in the new political setting. He was one of the few Moslems who had fought for the freedom of India from within the Congress. He was a former president of the Congress party, a staunch nationalist who believed in a national entity and who discarded Jinnah's two-nation theory. He was opposed to the idea of the Moslem League. He hated the very idea of partition.

The Congress called him "a true nationalist". Jinnah regarded him as somewhat of a quisling.

Azad's position on the issue of partition can be found in a speech he delivered many years ago in a presidential address to the Congress party. He had then said:

"I am a Moslem and I am proud of that fact. Islam's splendid traditions of thirteen hundred years are my inheritance. . . . But in addition to these sentiments I have others also, which the realities and conditions of my life forced upon me. The spirit of Islam does not come in the way of these sentiments. It guides and helps me forward. I am part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality. I am indispensable to this noble edifice and without me this splendid structure is incomplete. I am an essential element which has gone to build India. I can never surrender this claim. . . . Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common achievements. . . . Everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavour. There is indeed no aspect of our life which has escaped this stamp. Our languages were different, but we grew to use a common language; our manners and customs were dissimilar, but they acted and reacted on each other and thus produced a new synthesis. This joint wealth is the heritage of our common nationality."

That stand was difficult for him to maintain in the face of the situation as it developed in June 1947, when the Congress itself went back on one of its fundamental articles and accepted the idea of partition. By giving way to a division of the country, the Congress had virtually compromised the

position of nationalist Moslems like Azad who had fought for the freedom of India as a whole. These nationalist Moslems were now neither fish nor fowl.

Azad's feelings at that moment were very important to me. He was, as the title of *Maulana* suggested, a great scholar. I had often heard him deliver orations at Congress sessions. His was the type of Indian culture which revived the dignity and greatness of our land. His speeches made one feel proud of the heritage of our people. I had met him only once at close quarters, in 1939, at the little village of Bardoli in Gujerat. He was an impressive figure, with grey hair and a little Poincaré beard, wearing a long coat and a black Persian lamb cap. Mahatma Gandhi had sent for him on that occasion to offer him the presidency of the Congress party. But the scene had changed from that little village with its grass huts in the heart of India to the impressive and once imperial city of New Delhi, where Azad was in residence.

I drove up the little driveway of No. 22, Prithviraj Road, with its neatly-cut trees. It was 7.45 in the morning, the time fixed for the interview.

I was shown into a living room and asked to wait. In the few moments before Azad appeared I cast my eyes around that bare, impersonal room. Not a picture hung on the walls. There was no carpet. The mantelpiece was bare. Two austere divans faced each other and two rigid armchairs appeared to have just come from the hirers. There was a built-in bookshelf but there was not a book on it.

This bareness was intentional, obviously to contrast the simplicity of living of the people's representatives with the alleged extravagance of the British who had ruled in days gone by.

Azad then walked in through a side door. He said nothing to me as I rose to greet him. He coldly pointed to a chair.

I asked him a point-blank question. "What will be the position of nationalist Moslems in the Congress and in India?"

It shook him. No question in that last fortnight had been so pointed. With perfect dignity and self-assurance, he replied: "What should be our position? It will be the same as before."

Had he left it at that, I would have believed that the partition had left him unruffled, but he went on to explain the process of mind which led him to that conviction. He said: "There will be four million Moslems in Hindustan and two and a half million Hindus in Pakistan. They will have to live where they were born."

Azad still adhered to the belief that sooner or later Hindus and Moslems must come together. "They are one people really. They have lived together so long! They must come together again."

Later events showed how wrong he was, for many thousands lost their lives for being on the wrong side of the border and thousands more were killed in the exchange of population that followed. A sense of reality was absent in Azad that June morning. He could not see the wood for the trees.

According to the agreement between the Congress and the Moslem League, the fate of two Moslem-dominated areas in India was to be left to the people to decide by a referendum. One area was the important North-West Frontier which had for several years been dominated by Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan, a devout follower of Gandhi, who had founded the Red Shirt movement of passive resistance among the Moslem tribesmen of the Frontier. The Congress, therefore, believed that they could carry the Moslems of the North-West Frontier with them. They counted on the years of influence which they had exercised in that area through Gaffar Khan and through the *khaddar*-clad Congress premier, Dr. Khan Saheb. The other, much smaller, area was the district of Sylhet in the province of Assam.

I asked Azad how he, as a Moslem, thought those areas would vote. Of Sylhet he was very sure but of the North-West Frontier he could not say with any measure of certainty. "Of course I should think the Frontier will come with us, but I prefer to wait for the people's verdict."

Azad perhaps judged what his co-religionists in these areas would do by his own standards. In a choice between his political allegiance to the Congress and his allegiance to the Islamic faith, he had elected to go with the Congress. Perhaps there was little alternative for a man who had been

more than once president of this Congress and had opposed Jinnah on every demand for partition.

I asked him then what the Congress would stand for in the new India.

"The Congress will stand for the same things, always," he replied.

I asked him what the "same things" were, for the Congress had hitherto stood chiefly for the freedom of our people from the British, which had now been attained. How could it still stand for the "same things"?

He did some deep thinking over that question. It had not occurred to him before that with freedom won it would be difficult to hold the various discordant elements which had toed the Congress line behind Mahatma Gandhi. He could not see that this same Congress could not possibly hold together a capitalist like G. D. Birla and a socialist revolutionary like Jai Prokash Narain. He spoke of remodelling the Congress if necessary, but all this was very vague in his mind. The truth was that Congress leaders were so full of themselves in June 1947 that they could not look ahead.

* * * * *

As partition dominated the attainment of freedom, it was but logical that I should try and see the one man whose unceasing efforts had brought it about. He was Quaid-E-Azam Mohamed Ali Jinnah.

I first met Jinnah in 1938 at his Bombay house on Little Gibbs Road, Malabar Hill, when he was looked upon as somewhat of a heretic even by his own co-religionists. "Pakistan" was then nothing more than a word in a Moslem League resolution, mocked at by the political *pandits* in the country. Jinnah was at that time aware of his countrymen's mockery and if I read him rightly he seemed anxious to convince those few who occasionally went to him for an insight into this new idea.

The Jinnah of those days was politically not a self-possessed man, but a little unsure of himself, almost pleading for recognition for his cause. The one and a half hours I spent with him left me unconvinced that he would ever gather around him sufficient following and strength to make Pakistan an unchallengeable demand. He referred more

than once that day to the justness of the Moslem cause but I failed to see at that time why all the justice the Moslems wanted could not come to them through men of unimpeachable character like Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru. There was moreover, I now confess, some doubt in my mind about Jinnah's sincerity. I was inclined to believe that he was playing up to the British.

A whole year had passed after that first meeting with Jinnah during which he floundered for recognition. Then he came into the news again. The British had taken more notice of him and I approached him once more for my paper, then the *Bombay Chronicle.* My request was prompted by his last words at the former meeting, which were: "Come and see me whenever you want." But in the year that had passed Jinnah had changed. Perhaps the impatience in him had been responsible for the change, but he was a bitter man, very curt in his manner. The answer to my letter was a discourteous note from his secretary saying that Mr. Jinnah saw no purpose in giving an interview.

In New Delhi in June 1947 I tried again. His secretary, Khurshid, with whom I spoke on the 'phone, seemed more affable on this occasion. He thought Mr. Jinnah would like to see me. He would ring me back later. He did so. I was to see Jinnah four days later at ten o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Jinnah's New Delhi residence was at 10, Aurangzeb Road. When I called, I was shown into an ante-room where I found him sitting on a green leather chair. A huge pile of unopened telegrams lay on a footstool beside him. They had come to him from all parts of the country, for the attainment of Pakistan was a personal triumph for him.

Immaculately dressed in a China silk suit, a gay, well-tailored striped shirt with a stiff turned-down collar, he looked pale and tired. The strain of the last few years had told on him. Now that he had won his cherished goal, the restless energy which had impelled him all those years seemed to have died down. The aftermath of victory was an intense mental fatigue and he showed a desire to want to relax at that moment, to take a breath before he launched once again on the greater task which lay ahead. He was now committed to the building of a new state from scratch.

An exuberance of emotion would have been understand-

able at that psychological moment but the Jinnah who received me that morning was calm and unruffled.

"You have come a long way since we first met at Little Gibbs Road," I said.

One had to concede him his achievement, however much one differed from his politics and his ideology. The Congress had always a galaxy of talent at their beck and call, but Jinnah had worked single-handed. When the British made any proposals, the Congress consulted whatever expert opinion it needed. To help the Congress was regarded by every patriotic Indian as the first article of his faith. But Jinnah was his own adviser, his own economist, his own financial genius, his own expert on partition, economics, industry and on the manifold questions of administration, franchise and constitution which arose on every such occasion. He was an organization unto himself. Everything that happened in the name of the Moslem League really happened in his own house, which was also his office, with just a handful of secretaries doing the routine work for him. The judgement and decisions of the Moslem League were really those of Mohamed Ali Jinnah. Right or wrong, he had the courage to make them. He had the allegiance of his people to implement those decisions. The team spirit of the Moslem League under the captaincy of Jinnah was one of the most impressive achievements of the party. But for it, it is doubtful whether Pakistan would ever have come into being.

I was a little hesitant as to how he would receive me. More than once I had written disparagingly of his determination to divide what I considered to be my country and my people. But Jinnah was the essence of courtesy that morning. He seemed gracious in the hour of his triumph.

Then he began, "I want you to know that this is not to be an interview in the ordinary sense of the word. The questions you would ask me I will not be in a position to answer. You will want to know what form and shape Pakistan will take, what our policy will be on various matters. It is too soon for me to give you any answer now. We have only just begun."

He picked up a cigar. I did not interrupt his thoughts, for I wanted him to set the pace of this interview.

"There is an odd reason for my sending for you to-day. I

wanted to see you and tell you something I have been meaning to tell you for quite some time."

I thought I had it coming to me and that he wanted to refer to my frequent criticisms of Pakistan in the columns of the *Bombay Chronicle.*

But in slow, deliberate terms Jinnah said to me: "Your heart has always been in unity and you have held a different point of view from ours. I have read the things you have written and while we differed all the way it was gratifying to find someone on the other side who was able to see that we too had a point of view. You fought hard against us but I respected you because you wrote out of a conviction and not for money."

I was somewhat taken aback. Jinnah did not often indulge in compliments to those with whom he had political differences. He put me a little off my stride.

I changed the subject then and asked him whether with the coming of partition he would look back to India from Pakistan or whether he would henceforth look the other way—towards the pan-Islamic belt formed by Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and further on towards Turkey, to Kurdistan and other Islamic areas.

Jinnah replied: "Don't ask me these questions now. The future will decide these issues. Right now we part friends and we should remain friends."

He then told me how Mahatma Gandhi had asked him during the talks which broke down: "Can't we put our heads together and save the division?"

Jinnah continued: "How could it be saved? What expression would Moslems have in a strong Hindu state? Anyhow all that is finished now. All talk of saving the division is behind us. Partition has now become a fact. We have to accept it as such."

When he spoke of the Indian Congress and its leaders, he was intensely bitter. How he hated them! This bitterness he had infused into the Moslems of India. It had been his best political weapon. It had brought him Pakistan. But it had also been the direct cause of the civil war which took a heavy toll of innocent lives, Hindu, Moslem and Sikh.

Some of Jinnah's observations on the Congress that day left an indelible mark on my mind. He said: "There is no

real tolerance in them. They have no real desire to give and take. It has to be a clear and clean parting, Karaka. It has to be so. To my mind there is no other way. I mean it."

There was emotion in his voice. In the stillness that followed, he added in a soft, mellow, dejected voice: "They say it is my pride that has made me fight for Pakistan. I have no self-pride of that sort. I go to the humblest and poorest people."

"How many of the Moslems do you think you take with you to Pakistan?" I asked him.

"As many as want to come."

I told him I had seen Azad earlier that morning and that Azad was confident that Sylhet would go with the Congress but that of the North-West Frontier he was not too sure.

Jinnah gave a gentle mocking laugh.

"Which way would you vote if you were a Moslem?" he asked me. He shook his head and I could read his thought. The old Maulana is well-meaning but stupid, he seemed to say. He did not say it of course.

"The Congress's whole upbringing is like that," he continued. "They only see their own point of view and insist that their point of view is the only one. Nothing anyone says to the contrary will convince them that they are wrong. Let us wait and see how Sylhet and the Frontier vote."

Jinnah was right. Both areas voted solidly for him. But Maulana Abul Kalam Azad became the Minister for Education in the new Indian government. It was the Congress's reward for his loyalty.

* * * * *

I met a lot of people on that visit to New Delhi; politicians, statesmen, newspapermen and men of the Services. Many of these I had known in Europe, America, China, Burma and in my own country. I had the advantage, therefore, of not always being treated by them as just a casual newspaperman.

On a visit to the Imperial Secretariat, which is the nerve-centre of the whole government, I walked through the familiar corridors to see if I could find any change from the old days. The same sepoys still sprawled on benches. The same *khush-khush* curtains sprayed with water hung out-

side the office entrances, cooling the interiors in a primitive Indian way. A few rooms were now air-conditioned, but the air-conditioning plants had been very sparingly given.

Perhaps the most conspicuous change was to be noticed in the nameplates outside the offices. Sir Somebody-Somebody, K.C.S.I., K.B.E., was now replaced by some name which carried no obvious glory. A few were *pandits* but the greater majority were just plain Mister.

There were a few exceptions, for the old guard of Indians who had served under the British was still there. One such name was that of Sir Girjashankar Bajpai, who ranked as "Special Officer" in the External Affairs department.

The case of Bajpai was interesting. I had seen him only a few months ago in Washington when he was our Indian Minister there with the rank of an ambassador. While holding his many positions under the British rule—he was a member of the Viceroy's Council; he was our representative in Burma; he was virtually our ambassador in the United States, he attended the early meetings of the United Nations—he had faced the most bitter comments from the very Congress Ministers for whom he was now working. But these British-trained brains had the experience, the broad vision, which was indispensable to this new government of our country. Ideologies alone could not run an administration.

Bajpai called me in at once. He was glad to see me. He knew what was in my mind and so answered my question before I had even voiced it. He said: "I told them that if they wanted me I was available in whatever capacity they thought I could best serve the country. So here I am."

His job right then was to build the foundation of a Foreign Service. He was Chairman of the Board of Selection and interviewed hundreds of young men who aspired to become diplomats, consuls, and eventually, I suppose, ambassadors.

I asked him what he thought of our younger generation, assuming that the pick of them applied for the Foreign Service. "They are a very uneven lot," he replied. "They are thinking emotionally, not rationally. Perhaps they are affected by what has happened in the country; they show an unrest of mind."

Then I asked him what he thought of the future. I said: "How do you think it will all work out? Do you really think we are ready to govern ourselves?"

Bajpai was too wise to commit himself. He could not, in his position, afford to make an unfavourable forecast. He merely stressed in an official sort of way the need for making the best possible effort. But, much as I tried, I did not succeed in getting out of him a satisfactory answer to my question: "Will the best possible effort be enough?"

I then asked him whether there was any likelihood of the name of India being changed. Jinnah had chosen to call his part of India Pakistan. He had also driven home his idea that India was merely a geographical unit, and he was, therefore, likely to take the stand that, as divided, it was India no more. It was, moreover, becoming a fetish among Indians to use Indian names for the familiar landmarks of the British.

"Do you think we are likely to call ourselves Hindustan, or by some other Indian name?"

"It would be a great mistake for us to change our name," he replied. "Since the war of 1914 we have been represented in the League and everywhere in the world as India. If a part secedes, the rest, even with its limitations, inherits the international rights and obligations. These stand in the name of India. Jinnah can take any name he likes, he cannot make us change ours. There is, moreover, the precedent of Burma. Burma was originally part of India. When it seceded in 1937 it had to obtain its own international recognition, but India was not affected."

I wondered how long Sir Girjashankar Bajpai, with his years of connexion with the British, would last out in these *khaddar*-clad Gandhi-capped, anti-British surroundings. I think Bajpai himself could not have forecast his future on that day. But, contrary to all expectations, he has gone on to become the Secretary General of the External Affairs Department, the right-hand man of Pandit Nehru in Foreign Affairs. I wonder if he ever kept a scrap-book of the days when he served the British.

One thing had not changed in that Lutyens-built imperial secretariat. The new rulers had walked in and taken over the red-tape-bound files left by the British. The atmosphere

was lethargic and heavy. The little men who worked in these big rooms were still afraid to make a decision and to act. To those who had always been little opportunists the transfer of power was only another opportunity.

Later that afternoon I ran into that colourful figure, the goatee-bearded Sardar Pannikar. He was the Dewan (Chief Minister) of Bikaneer, an Indian State with a ruling prince. Pannikar had been a professional prime minister and his services had been made use of by more than one Indian prince. He, therefore, had the India of the Indian princes absolutely taped. He knew their weaknesses, their constitutional positions, their intrigues and complications—the whole set-up of princely India.

There were, before the partition, 93,000,000 people in the various states of India. Sixty-three million of these lived in seventeen states. The other 30,000,000 were divided between the petty monarchies which had been glorified into sovereign states, mostly because the British relied on these little sovereigns to keep their little areas in order. The British idea was to dot the land with loyal outposts.

Pannikar was fascinating to listen to as he talked of Indian princes of the eighteenth century and of how this unique position arose between them and the British. During the half century from the invasion of Nadirshah in 1738 to the days of Warren Hastings, who had laid early foundations of British rule, every state was the prey of marauding brigands, called *pindaras*. The Nawab of Tonk established himself as the head of the *pindaras* and brigandry became an organized profession, run on almost respectable lines. It was at that time that the Vizier of Oudh wrote to Warren Hastings and asked for protection from these *pindaras*.

Such was the crude origin from which sprang the relationship between the Indian princes and the British. As the British obtained more control over the country they coordinated these various indigenous states into a separate entity called Indian India, to be distinguished from British India over which the British ruled absolutely. In theory the princes were sovereigns over their own plot of land but were strengthened by and owed allegiance to what they called "the paramount power". That was the constitutional

position. In actual practice the Resident or the Political Agent in every Indian state, who represented the British, was the power behind the throne.

Pannikar had foresight. He realized sooner than many of the princes the absolute need for these Indian princes to accede to the Indian Union or to Pakistan, even though in theory it was agreed that, when the British quit, the individual princes would become sovereign powers. Pannikar's realism, his quick summing up of Congress policy as he thought it would evolve towards the states in the future, his shrewdness in realizing that it was better to save a part of their power than eventually to have to give up the whole, were in refreshing contrast to the hopes and ambitions of some of the princes. One of them, with a state the size of a back garden, had said to me: "If Lithuania can exist as an individual state, why cannot I?"

Sardar Pannikar and I talked often in the lounge of our hotel. These talks were off the record. He is now our ambassador to China, and his opinions will have to remain off the record.

Here again was a man who had worked and been trained by association with the British and who was to be called upon by the Indian government to represent our country abroad. No one at that time would have believed that such a thing could happen under the Congress, for the Congress was all too sure of the ability of its party personnel to govern the land from end to end with men from its own party. But in that week in Delhi when I had put up Sardar Pannikar's name as a possible diplomatic representative of ours the knowledgeable men in the Congress had laughed out my suggestion.

With the importance that had suddenly been focused on the Moslem League, the editor of *Dawn*, the organ of the League, naturally evoked a certain news interest. *Dawn* was about the only paper the Moslem League had; at that time just four badly-printed sheets.

I found the editor, Altaf Hussain, in his apartment in a middle-class tenement on the outskirts of the city. He was wearing a *lungi*, which is wrapped around the body as one would a bath towel. He wore a green bush shirt on top. He was a Moslem from Bengal, intensely earnest, wearing

glasses and without a trace of humour in his expression. Perhaps his earnestness was due to the importance his paper had suddenly assumed. Perhaps the seriousness came naturally to him.

The editor of *Dawn* visualized no difficulties about the future of Pakistan. He was also sure that the link with India would continue. "Trains still run from Dacca to Delhi," he said. "There is no reason why they should not continue to do so in the future."

Moslem Leaguers, like the Congressmen, were all too sure of themselves. Nothing could go wrong with India or Pakistan once the British had gone and power had come into Indian or Moslem hands. It was not as if these spokesmen of the two dominions had any particular faith in their people. They had not. They were too conscious of the people's backwardness, their illiteracy, their lack of character. Their confidence was in themselves, in their ability to dominate the country and the people with the power they inherited from the British. They were hell-bent on establishing a democracy even if its establishment entailed a provisional dictatorship.

It was difficult to paint the New Delhi scene in one single colour or with an even brush. On the dance floor of the Chelmsford Club I saw an old Sikh of over sixty years of age dancing with a rosary in his hand. His paunch stuck out of his long coat. Diamond-studded buttons ran down his curved front. They told me he was a wealthy contractor who had made his money out of army contracts.

Near Pandit Nehru's residence on York Road I saw a beggar sprawled, too weary to beg.

Outside General Thimayya's residence on Roberts Road I saw a night watchman, bamboo in hand. There were blood-stains on his scanty clothe[illegible] A tuft of hair sprouted from his headtop. It was his *shen*[illegible] (Hindu caste-mark). He was a Gujjer from Gulgaon, north of Delhi, where serious *disturbances* had taken place.

In the garden of the Imperial Hotel I saw Hindus and Moslems sitting round little tables, sipping whisky and talking glibly of the future.

In the swimming pool of a well-known club there were a few Sikhs happily swimming, beards, long hair and all.

Their hair-oil glistened on the water as if a pipe-line had leaked nearby.

At Air India's main booking office in Connaught Circus a few well-to-do Moslem families sat anxiously waiting for their call.

I saw the poorer refugees gather around New Delhi Central station. Anguish was writ across their hungry faces. A question mark hung on their knitted brows. They seemed afraid of the sunlight as children are of the dark.

They were, in their different ways, all moving towards freedom.

II

SO FREEDOM CAME

BOMBAY, AUGUST 14TH, 1947.

There was something different about that August morning. I could feel it as I lay in bed in the small hours between sleeping and waking. It was our last day of bondage. I counted the hours that were to pass before we became free people in the eyes of the world.

The day itself was a normal working day like any other we had known. It was the thought of the morrow which made it so exciting.

From early in the afternoon a brisk movement was noticeable in the streets. There were sounds of festivity in the air. It was difficult not to be conscious of the moment towards which we were moving. "At the stroke of midnight", Nehru had said, "a new India will be born."

It was nearly 5.30 when I finished my day's work, cleared my table of all the grievances and grouses that pour into a newspaper office, and said good-bye to my colleagues. More than a day was ending; an era was soon to pass away. We would meet again in a new land, even though geographically it was to be the same. The impact of freedom appeared to make that difference.

The crowds of office workers returning home were gay. On government offices, some of the larger commercial houses, the Secretariat, and the big hotels, a handful of workmen were putting the finishing touches to the illuminations. Floral arches spanned the main thoroughfares. Festoons were strung across streets and lanes. Colourful bunting and streamers waved everywhere. The smaller roads and by-lanes had been swept clean of the usual litter of rubbish.

Huge, lumbering lorries with full loads of workmen rolled past. Slogans flew in the air. From one of these lorries they greeted me lustily and for a moment I wondered why. Then my eyes fell on the PRESS label stuck on

the windscreen of my car, and at the same time I heard them shout "Long live the Pressmen who kept our fight alive." The people were in a mood to cheer. Everyone was happy.

The vehicular traffic moved slowly along the crowded streets for all were returning home. That evening they would bathe and anoint themselves as for a holy fiesta. Caste and out-caste, capitalist and labourer, city man and peasant all had the same idea.

As I came home I smelt the smell of rich Indian food. My servants told me they were grouping together for a little celebration of their own. They had pooled their rations, bought chickens for a *pillau* and a large salmon which was dressed with onion and garlic.

As I bathed and changed for the evening I took stock of the years that had passed and recounted the days of the struggle, the anguish of our people, the hopes and fears which had punctuated this great, non-violent movement for freedom.

My mind went back to my schooldays, when I had first learnt how India had passed into subjugation with the granting of the Charter to the East India Company by Queen Elizabeth. The Battle of Plassey accelerated the process whereby a commercial nation gained control of a country which was almost a continent and were able to lord it over a people who numbered one-fifth of the world.

My mind went back to the events and men who had made this day possible for us. From Dadabhoy Nowroji, one of the first crusaders for freedom, to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, some of the finest of India's sons had dedicated their lives to the cause of freedom. They had endured physical chastisement, spiritual bludgeoning and had suffered humiliation and privation so that this country of ours could be free.

It was a Scotsman or, as we called him, a "Britisher" who helped pave the way, an ex-secretary of the Home and Revenue Department, Mr. Allan Octavius Hume, who, ironically enough, was responsible for starting an institution "to promote a better understanding between natives and whites". The institution was to become the Indian National Congress. This was in 1885.

At the turn of the century there came the great Maharashtrian, Tilak, who first raised the cry of *swaraj*, a word which was to inflame young men with patriotic enthusiasm and conjure up a vision which was their inspiration.

Then came Gokhale, Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lala Lajpat Rai, Mohamed Ali and his brother Shaukat Ali, Vithalbhai Patel and his brother Vallabbhai, Srinivasa Shastri and a whole galaxy of Indian personalities who played their parts in this non-violent revolution.

In 1942, climaxing half a century of battling for freedom, Mahatma Gandhi, who had by then given this revolution its distinctive shape, decided upon another movement calling upon the British to quit. The two words "Quit India" sounded the death-knell of British imperialism.

All that seemed past and over. The fight was done.

That night I dined at the Taj Mahal Hotel. The Mayor of Bombay was my host. Ours was just a private party like many others in the room. At our table was a young Moslem Begum, a Hindu Congressman, a Parsi jeweller, a Polish Jew and his English wife, an American couple, Nehru's younger sister, a couple of newspapermen, one of whom was my host's son, and an industrial magnate—the half-French, half-Indian head of Tatas.

As it neared midnight, when the room would be darkened and the new flag illuminated, they called me forward to say a few words. I moved to the dais and said: "To-day we join the community of the free people of the world. The flag which was once the symbol of rebellion has become the flag of the people. Let us hope that under it this country of ours will find peace, dignity and greatness again."

As the lights came on, free Indians greeted each other with fond embraces, not knowing in the excitement what was the correct greeting of the moment. I noticed an elderly Hindu, wearing a red and gold turban, joining his hands in *namaskar* and bowing humbly to the flag. Then he sat down in his chair and wept.

Outside the streets were chock-a-block with people. That wide open space between the Taj Mahal Hotel and the Gateway of India was one solid mass. The bright lights of

the illuminations fell on them. From the harbour the ships were throwing searchlights on the land. So freedom came—like all the New Years rolled up in one!

What a night that was!—with the crowds refusing to go home, with men in dinner jackets dancing with men in *dhotis*, with Englishmen cheerily singing Auld Lang Syne, with Gandhi caps being tossed into the air and British army berets perched on Indian heads, with Indians speaking pidgin English and Englishmen replying in equally bad Hindustani, with Indian women, not many years out of purdah, caring little who saw their faces, with the hotel band leaving their rostrum to play to the crowds below, and the crowds yelling "*Jai Hind*" to the tune of Tipperary. So the night passed—one long mad hour with the shouting dying as the morning light came.

With the dawn there came the more sober realization of the greatness of the day. It was raining heavily till late in the afternoon when there was a great parade of elephants and horses, tanks and guns, followed by men, women and little children. Thousands of people walked in a procession from Gowalia Tank to the tune of "God Bless the Prince of Wales". Probably too embarrassed to play "God Save The King" the band apparently decided to settle for the non-existent Prince of Wales. It was the spirit that mattered, not the technicality! In the first flush of freedom, flags were hoisted upside down and sometimes even at half mast. No one seemed to care for little details like these.

It was the same all over the city and what was happening in our town was happening all over the country.

* * * * *

In Delhi, as the great day approached, the enthusiasm and excitement grew. Then, for some inexplicable reason, a religious spirit spread over the capital. *Time* magazine in its report said: "As the great day approached, the Indians thanked their various gods and rejoiced with prayers, poems, hymns and songs."

Even Pandit Nehru, who had never been known to frequent the temples or to indulge in much religious ceremony, consented to have the blessings of the religious *pandits*. From Tanjore there came emissaries of the head priest of

the *Sanyasis*, an order of Hindu ascetics. It was traditional in ancient India to derive power and authority from the holy men. Pandit Nehru yielded to all this religious ceremony because it was said of old of the kings of India that this was the traditional way of assuming power. The mood of New Delhi had become almost superstitious.

In the evening the priests walked ahead of these religious processions. They carried the sceptre, the holy water which they had brought with them from Tanjore, and rice. They laid their gifts at the feet of the Prime Minister. Holy ash was marked on the Pandit's forehead and the priests gave him their blessings.

Later, at the house of the President of the Constituent Assembly, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, who was also President of the Congress, Pandit Nehru sat round a holy fire; around it the women of the house were chanting hymns. The oldest woman among them made an auspicious *tilli* mark on the forehead of all the ministers and constitution-makers.

All then left for the Constituent Assembly hall which was gaily decorated in saffron, white and green, for the occasion. Here Pandit Nehru said: "Years ago we made a tryst with destiny and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awaken to life and freedom."

"At exactly the twelfth chime a conch shell, traditional herald of the dawn, raucously sounded through the Chamber. Members of the Constituent Assembly arose, pledged themselves to the service of the people. . . . Delhi's thousands rejoiced. The town was gay with orange, white and green. Bullocks' and horses' legs were painted in the new national colours and silk merchants sold tri-coloured *sarees*. Triumphant light blazed everywhere, even in the *bhangi* (untouchable) quarter. Candles and oil lamps flickered brightly in houses that had never before seen an artificial light. The government did not want anyone to be unhappy on India's independence day."[1]

In the general celebrations that followed, all political prisoners, including Communists, were freed. All death sen-

[1] *Time* magazine.

tences were commuted to life imprisonment, and all slaughter-houses were closed. Little children were given free sweets and there were fireworks for them all over the city.

The grace shown by Britain in handing over the reins of power was reciprocated with like grace by the common man of India who, forgetting a political fight of a quarter of a century, rose to the occasion and gave Lord Mountbatten, the representative of the British in India, a cheer reserved only for our own leaders. They shouted in a great roar which echoed through the capital "Mountbatten *ki jai*". It was a singular honour for an Englishman in India.

Mountbatten had earned this for himself with his polished diplomacy, his compelling sincerity and his courage in implementing the British pledge. Human contacts came naturally to him. In two months he had won over not only the Congress and the Moslem League; he had also succeeded in converting the Tory diehards of England.

Soon after the Constituent Assembly broke up, Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad went over to Lord Mountbatten and asked him if he would consent to become India's first Governor General, so that thirty-two minutes after Mountbatten had ceased to be Viceroy of India he became free India's first Governor General.

In spectacular fashion the Mountbattens drove through the Delhi crowds in their open carriage, drawn by six bay horses. Normally a Viceroy was only to be seen from a distance, and certainly never touched by the people, but on this occasion the people crowded around Mountbatten's slowly moving carriage and they shook hands with him all the way. Two little Indian urchins seemed to live in a fairy tale as they drove in the same carriage with the King's representative.

No one, however, was oblivious of the fact that the chief architect of our country's freedom, Mahatma Gandhi, was not to be found in the capital. He was in troubled Calcutta on that day, mourning because India had been divided. That very morning he had moved into the Moslem quarter of Calcutta to bring courage and strength to this suffering minority. He spent the day in fasting and in prayer. Angry Hindus stoned his house and broke up his prayer meeting

because of the harbour his presence was giving to the Moslems.

Sadly he remarked: "If you still prefer to use violence, remove me. It will not be me but my corpse that will be taken away from here."

"For this disillusioned father of Indian independence," *Time* magazine remarked, "there might be some consolation in the rare cry he heard from Moslem lips, '*Mahatma Gandhi zindabad.*' "

But the sombre note which Gandhi struck died amidst the bursts of fireworks, the singing, the bells and the conch shells. There seemed to be an atmospheric change all over the country, like the smell of earth after the first showers of rain. Freedom had come to four hundred million people, three hundred million in India and one hundred million in Pakistan. From every flagmast in the country now flew the tricolour of the free Indian people—the flag of deep saffron and dark green with the white central belt and the dark blue *charka* (wheel) in the centre, a replica of Asoka's wheel of Sarnath. Asoka was a great king who lived in the golden era of Indian history, when India was closest to being a nation, whole and strong. The flag was, therefore, associated with the tradition of the land. The three colours once formed the flag of the Indian National Congress. The one difference was that the spinning-wheel had given place to the wheel of Asoka.

This had been a point of much controversy. The spinning-wheel was introduced by Gandhi for the economic betterment of the villagers. It had become the symbol of the poverty-stricken masses of the country and spinning, which had its justification primarily in economics, became the symbol of the nation's fight for freedom.

Gandhi took a stubborn stand for the retention of the spinning-wheel on the Indian national flag and threatened that he would not salute a flag of the Indian nation that did not bear it. It was a powerful threat in a country in which every whim and word of his was a commandment and his every fad an article of faith. But the main difficulty in the way of the retention of the spinning-wheel was an heraldic imperfection because a flag had to look the same from either side and obviously the spinning-wheel would

not. The situation was becoming rather ridiculous when Gandhi climbed down and agreed to respect a national flag with Asoka's wheel instead of his spinning-wheel.

There were many who found it difficult to salute the flag for other reasons. For decades, the stooges and minions of British imperialism had treated the same Congress flag with contempt and scorned the principles for which it stood. The rough-shod feet of many an insignificant policeman had trampled it underfoot and many a policeman had wielded the *lathi* on the heads of those who had been so ill-advised as to hoist it. Now they had to march past the same flag and salute it.

In the darkest days of the struggle, any head that wore a Gandhi cap was fair game for a hard-hitting minion of the law. Then the Gandhi cap signified revolt against constitutional authority. With independence, that coarse white cap of hand-spun cloth became the badge of authority.

In every government office there were people who had served the British loyally, looking upon Congressmen as upstarts. They honestly believed in the benefits of British administration and looked upon those who fought for freedom as enemies of the peace of the country.

They had ridiculed the movement for freedom and never dreamed that the British would surrender the country to the malcontents. Now they who had believed that *Swaraj* was a fantasy and a madman's dream which could never be realized found themselves confronted with the reality of freedom. It was not easy for these loyal servants of the British to adjust their minds to this historical phenomenon.

There were houses in the land which had become divided against themselves in the course of the struggle. Old faiths died hard and many of the older generation who had never felt the stirrings of patriotism had found it difficult to accept this young madness for self-government. Freedom was anarchy to them, and many were the fears they had for the future. But in that dawn of freedom, it was difficult even for these men of little faith to fail to respond to the general enthusiasm. The idea of freedom was beautiful and compelling.

But that day, which witnessed the consummation of a long struggle for freedom, saw too the tragedy of a rupture

within the nation. A people who had battled together against a common enemy, moved by the same pulsations of patriotism and the same vision of freedom, were now to be divided. A country that was one through long centuries of historical development and by virtue of geographical frontiers was to be artificially bisected into two dominions.

Partition was unnatural. Geographically the country was indivisible and by historical association the two communities were inseparable. Their cultures had nourished each other so long that they were indistinguishable. Now a frontier would have to be created, tearing through bonds of association. Not the surgeon's healing knife but the butcher's destructive axe would be in operation. The country would be disrupted, the orderly threads of four hundred million human lives, which were interwoven to form the fabric of India, would be torn.

Like a nightmare, one could see the tragedy of division, the chaos it would bring and the violence it was likely to entail. All along the frontier people would have to strike their tents, gather up their belongings and emigrate to the side of the frontier to which they were consigned. The frontier question would be a bloody one.

But the uncertainty of the future was overshadowed by the present. We had faith that those who had led us from slavery to freedom would now lead us to peace. We thought over the dangers that were past and lost the fear of the perils ahead.

There was Gandhi who had lighted the path to freedom when all around was dark and everything seemed lost.

There were Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel and many others who had caught the sparks of Gandhi's teachings and in whose hearts burned the same fire, tried, proven leaders of the masses.

There was the Congress which these selfless men had built tier by tier with their sacrifice, an institution of altruistic national service. The Congress which had been the spearhead of our people's struggle for freedom would now guard the freedom we had won. The leadership that had seen us through so many dangers would not fail us.

The faith of our three hundred million people was centred in the Congress.

III

THE UNDECLARED CIVIL WAR

LATE ONE EVENING IN September, a month after freedom, the phone rang in my house.

"I am Captain ——," a man's voice said. "I have just come down from the North with a special message for you. I am to deliver it to you in person."

"From whom is the message?" I asked.

"I'd rather not say on the phone. It is a very urgent matter and if you can spare a little time now, I'll come round at once."

I saw the Captain later that same evening. "Things are happening in the Punjab," the Captain said, "of which no one, except those on the spot, can have any possible idea. Some of the senior men in the army feel that someone like you, who is unbiased on the communal[1] issue, should be sent for to see things for himself and to tell it to our people. It is something unbelievable. Thousands on both sides of the frontier are just being wiped out every day. It is an undeclared civil war."

I asked him whether the invitation came officially from the Army.

"No," he replied. "That would involve permission from the government and I don't think the government would like to ask the Press over."

[1] The word "communal" is used in India differently from its normal dictionary usage. "Communal" in the dictionary suggests the coming together of communities. In India it is applied to differentiate one community from the other; it implies segregation, separation, antipathy. It is the Indian usage of the word which is adopted in this book. When one speaks of communal dining rooms or messes, it means those reserved for one or the other community only. Likewise, communal cricket means cricket in which teams which oppose each other are drawn exclusively from one or the other community. Communal riots are riots caused by feelings roused by one community against the other. The communal question is one which arises out of this "exclusivist" attitude. It is used with the same sort of meaning as "the racial question".

"Are there no Pressmen there?"

"Officially none. But in your case arrangements will be made to fly you in. It would be easier if you wore khaki—your war correspondent's uniform. It is in fact advisable for your personal safety."

It was a very nice compliment to be singled out for an assignment like this.

I asked him for his identity card and his movement control order, both of which he produced. I told him I was ready to leave as soon as he could make the necessary arrangements.

We left the following day for New Delhi. Here I was put on a military plane bound for Amritsar, which was on our side of the Punjab. Military planes were the only form of transport which could reach this scene of civil war.

The young Air Force officers were no strangers to me. I had hitch-hiked on their planes often during the Burma campaign. These personal contacts were to be my only passport in this part of the world where all forms of organized government had ceased to exist. Here there was only chaos which the Army and the Air Force were trying desperately hard to sort out.

Amritsar was the holy city of the Sikhs, nine miles from the border. I reached it a little before noon on Monday. From the airfield I went straight to the headquarters of the Military Evacuation Organization (MEO) over which presided the colourful figure of a turbaned Sikh, General Chimini. I told the General how I had come there and asked for his co-operation, which he readily gave.

"You had better have an escort too," he said. "I'll arrange that for you. It's all right around H.Q. because that is heavily guarded but I should not go very far without an escort. It just isn't safe right now. Life has no value here."

So I got myself fitted up with an escort, with transport, and a roof over my head. A kind Indian family offered to put me up in their home.

As I drove into the city I passed the first of the refugee camps I was to see. There were some 40,000 people in that camp, a colossal figure I thought. Later I was to find that this number was just a flea-bite, for some 3,000,000 people were on the road.

The stench which came from this refugee camp was overpowering. It was the stench of decay, disease and death. I held my nose.

The people in these camps were our own people, the Indians of our new dominion. Herded like cattle, they had come many long miles on foot across the border. They had fled to us in search of safety.

At the edge of the road they undid their pyjamas and relieved themselves unashamed. Forty thousand people could hardly be expected to wait for adequate sanitary arrangements. Nature did not stop for governments to function. The smell of urine permeated the air. There was a surplus of filth with which no one could cope.

I was in a jeep with a strapping Sikh Colonel. He shook his head in despair. "The stench of freedom," he mournfully said. "It has come to my holy city."

I knew this stench. I had smelt it first at Belsen when the Allied forces liberated that Nazi concentration camp. We said then that all Germans were guilty of that crime. The Germans wept and said they did not know. We said that ignorance of those horrors was no excuse. We called the Germans swine.

Much the same charge would be levelled against our people, I thought, if the curtain was not lifted on the happenings in the two Punjabs. The Punjab had been cut into two by the partition; East Punjab was part of India, West Punjab belonged to Pakistan. A few seemed to know, but no one had told our people what was really happening there. The Indian Press was content to play its usual submissive role.

Our newspapers had played down the story of the Punjab to a point where it became inaccurate and almost untrue. What was virtually a war of extermination between the Hindus and the Sikhs on one side and the Moslems on the other—an undeclared civil war, as the Captain had called it—our editors called "disturbances". The places where thousands of innocent people had been butchered had been called "dangerously disturbed areas". On the ground that the spreading of the news would affect other areas, the Indian Press volunteered to blackout the news.

The "Call to Peace" issued by the editors of Bombay was

an example of the fatuousness in which the Indian Press indulged. Their appeal read:

"The distressing events that have been occurring in the city during the last few days have caused pain and suffering to thousands of innocent citizens. It is the innermost desire of everyone that peaceful conditions should be restored immediately. . . . We, the editors representing the Press in Bombay, earnestly appeal that every endeavour should be made to end these outbursts of violence. . . ."

The appeal was pointless, for none of the papers in which it appeared could reach any of the areas in which Hindus and Moslems were killing each other.

As the British were no longer in power there seemed no justification for whitewashing our own shortcomings. We had only to answer to ourselves.

Moreover, the hands of the Nehru government were clean with regard to this civil war. Its faults were its acts of omission but not of commission. Perhaps it should have foreseen the dangers involved in such an artificial partitioning of what had been for years a single unit. Perhaps it should have asked the British to guarantee that the partition would not involve the chaos which it did. Perhaps it was difficult for anyone to have foreseen that the exchange of population would involve so many human beings. Why then was our government afraid of telling the truth to the people? I failed to see why the Indian Press did not pinpoint the guilt on to the instigators of this crime and depravity in the Punjab, who had brought about a situation which was bleeding the Punjab white.

While Britain honoured its pledges on August 15th, 1947, and gave to my country its freedom, the fact remained that many of those Englishmen who were left behind to carry out the details of the transfer of power did not share the enthusiasm of His Majesty's government or of the British people over the decision to quit India.

They rather begrudged it.

They resented that this country, which had been their preserve for over 150 years, should be handed over lock, stock and barrel to the "natives". After being the overlords in India they resented having to fade into insignificance in some English suburb.

One can only judge individual guilt in retrospect. But, even now, those who viewed the Punjab closely are conscious of the part played by some of the civilian officials and military officers in allowing the situation to develop as it did. Significant was the fact that the province of the Punjab had been *ruled,* not governed, for nine months prior to the outbreak of the civil war, under emergency powers wielded by a governor. Democratic government, therefore, was never given a fair chance to function in this vitally crucial area.

The effect of these disruptive bureaucratic elements could, however, have been neutralized had it not been for the presence on that same scene at the same time of various communal organizations, whose fundamental creeds were based on mutually exclusive religious ideas.

In the West Punjab the Moslem League had its National Guards, which were reminiscent of the Nazi SS. They wore uniforms. They were constantly being drilled. They were encouraged to carry arms, which were secretly supplied to them by their sympathizers. They were the armed wing of the Moslem League and the League counted upon them as a state would count upon its soldiers.

On our side, in the East Punjab, the Sikhs had their Shahidi Dal and the Hindus had their armed wing of the Hindu Mahasabha which was called the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. That mouthful stood for "Saviours of the Motherland". They were more familiarly known by their initials R.S.S.

The origin of the R.S.S. throws some light on its character. Twenty-five years ago a handful of misguided young Brahmins from Maharashtra in western and central India gathered in a dingy room in the old city of Nagpur around a Dr. Hedgewar, an ex-student of the Calcutta National Medical College. Hedgewar was once a Congressman. He had also been a terrorist.

The immediate problem which these young men were discussing that day was how best to defend themselves against the Moslems during the recurring communal riots in which, despite their numbers, they were the losers. Areas being so congested Hindu music was bound to be played near Moslem mosques, and riots were therefore bound to keep

recurring. To the R.S.S. way of thinking it was more important that Hindu musicians and drummers be protected from the infuriated Moslem worshippers who, knife in hand, ran out of their mosque, than that their ritual music be sacrificed for communal harmony.

Hedgewar promised all this and much more. If the Hindus could muster their physical, cultural and spiritual resources, the whole of India could be theirs, he told them. He drilled a handful of these young Hindu boys, called the "Akhadas", taught them how to wrestle, swing *lathis* and spears. The foundation of the R.S.S. was laid.

1927 saw Hindu-Moslem riots break out in Nagpur again. On this occasion the R.S.S. went into action. With fire in their bellies, courage in their hearts and strength in their arms, the Hindus fought and drove the Moslems back. They regarded it as the first feather in their caps.

The sporadic outbreaks of Hindu-Moslem riots which occurred in India over a period of years provided the ambitious Hedgewar with fertile soil in which to plant the seeds of his fanatical Hinduism. The idea of restoring India to her pristine glory satisfied the ego of frustrated middle-class young Hindus and they took to the R.S.S. with fanatical fervour. Military parades and uniforms were introduced. Hedgewar became the self-appointed dictator. He was called by the impressive title of Sar Sangh Chalak—a sort of commander-in-chief.

The R.S.S. spread to the remotest corner of the country. Patient and dogged, ruthless in purpose, Hedgewar made their ranks swell to 25,000 by 1935. But the R.S.S. always remained a secret organization. At the head of the hierarchy was the Sar Sangh Chalak, *der Fuehrer*. There followed the various other party ranks each with an orthodox Sanskrit title: Vibhag Sangh Chalak, Prant Sangh Chalak (Provincial Commander) and so on. The R.S.S. army was divided into platoons of twenty-five each under a Patha Shikshak (Platoon Commander) assisted by a Saha Shikshak. Each order had a Boudhik who taught them the doctrine of the Sangh. Volunteers paid from their own pockets for their uniforms.

The oath of the R.S.S. to which the men pledged themselves ran:

"With reverence to my ancestors and the Bhagwa Jhenda (the flag), I hereby pledge that I have become a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak (R.S.S.) for the protection of Hindu dharma (religion), Hindu culture and Hindu society, with all my abilities, physical, financial and spiritual."

The finances of the Sangh were naturally a closely guarded secret. But it lived on the support of the Hindu feudal lords, the Hindu capitalists and some of the Hindu princes. The men of the R.S.S. did not believe in thinking for themselves. Theirs was not to ask how or why. Their duty was to be ready to do or die. Loyalty to leader and death in defence of the *dharma* were considered the most sacred duties of every R.S.S. man.

In 1940 Hedgewar died, leaving his deputy, Golwalkar, in sole charge of the Sangh. The total membership was by then estimated as more than half a million.

These various organizations, the Hindu R.S.S., the Moslem National Guards, the Sikh Shahidi Dal, had made it their business to equip themselves with arms, which they had secured from various sources and by which they hoped one day to play the same vital role in usurping power for their community in India as the Nazi SS had done for the *herrenvolk* in Germany. The important difference was that in Germany there was only one SS, but in a single province of India, the Punjab, three rival organizations with conflicting ideologies were arming themselves illicitly for *der tag*. So that when the respective dominion governments assumed power on August 15th, they found that in one area alone they had to fight on a four-pronged front. Inside the administration they had to fight three fanatically communal organizations.

Already the relations between the two governments—of India and Pakistan—had been strained over the partition issue. Their hurried attempts to patch up their differences were of no avail. The bitterness had gone too deep to be handled by exchange of courtesies. The Hindu who had his hearth and home in the Punjab hated the Moslem for what he had done to his life, his people, his peace and happiness. The Moslem who had lived all his life in India hated being treated as a pariah dog in Hindu India. The partition,

therefore, created a new community. Its people were "refugees".

These were some of the factors behind the scenes which our government glossed over, not wanting to apportion the blame. Moreover, according to the arrangement arrived at between the government and the Indian Press, the names of the communities were to be left out from Press reports of the "disturbances", making these reports as unintelligible as possible.

This attitude of the government and the Indian Press did not find favour with Mahatma Gandhi who wrote in his paper the *Harijan*: "There seems to me to be no reason for this hush-hush policy save that it is a legacy from the autocracy which, let us hope, the national governments have displaced. Those who ought not to know, know who stabs whom. And those who should know are kept in the dark. . . . Let darkness be exposed to light. It will be dispelled quicker."

This higher journalism was not practised by our nationalist editors who had appropriated the trusteeship of enlightening the people. This was the first encroachment on the right of the people to have access to the truth. It was the first act of surrender of the freedom of the Press.

A sample of these "disturbances", which Indian editors never saw, presented itself to me at Amritsar almost as soon as I arrived. A train had arrived at Amritsar Station that same day. It had brought Hindu refugees from the West Punjab. This train had been attacked by Moslems three times on its way out of Pakistan. The escorting Moslem guards could do but little. From the scanty stragglers who survived when the train finally steamed into Amritsar the casualties were judged to be 2,000. The train was met by Miss Mridula Sarabhai, daughter of a millionaire mill-magnate, who had devoted her life to social work. She was Pandit Nehru's personal representative at Amritsar, working closely with the Military Evacuation Organization. The train was also seen by Phil Talbot, a responsible and conservative U.S. correspondent.

Later that same day, going in the opposite direction from India into Pakistan was another train which also stopped at Amritsar Station. Because of its peculiar geographical posi-

tion and its proximity to the border Amritsar had become a sort of clearing-house for refugees from the two adjoining dominions. In retaliation for the attack on the Hindu trains, the Indians at Amritsar, who were largely Sikhs, had tampered with the rail tracks and de-routed the Moslem train to a shunting near the Khalsa College where a large mob of armed Sikhs lay in hiding in uninhabited, burnt-down houses and attacked the Moslem train for forty solid minutes before any military help could reach the spot.

The Sikh mob was estimated at 5,000 strong when the attack was on. The men in hiding had given a signal upon which every available Sikh in the neighbourhood came upon the scene. The Moslems on the train, approximating 3,000, had consisted of men, women and children. Their slaughter took place late at night, and when the Army arrived a few hours later there were only some 200 wounded and dazed people left out of that number.

The casualties included a British commissioned officer, and two Gurkha soldiers who formed part of the Indian escort on the train. These men were killed by the mob. Four other Gurkhas were captured by the Sikhs and no one knew what had become of them. These Gurkhas were taken for having given protection to the Moslems, even though they were only carrying out our government's orders. Our Army had to escort the outgoing refugees.

The train was shunted back early next morning from Khalsa College to the main Amritsar station. It was now heavily guarded. When I got to the platform I was asked to be most careful in the event of a mob rush by the surviving Moslems. A Sten-gun and a pistol gave me cover. But there appeared to be no danger from these people who lay sprawled on the platform too dazed to realize what had happened. Frightened at my presence with my escorts, these poor people begged to be spared their lives. They thought I had come to shoot them.

The 2,000-odd bodies of the dead were still in the train. There were ten to fifteen in each compartment. Men, women and children lay dead in the most ghastly positions, flung on the floor, sprawled on their trunks, huddled in corners. Many of them were naked, for their clothes had been ripped off their dead bodies. Many a head and hand lay dismem-

bered from the rest of the body. The attackers wasted no time in getting at the ornaments. Heads also lay cracked as if with a huge nut-cracker. Stomachs were ripped open or pierced. Mouths gaped wide in horror, fear and pain. The platform and the railway carriages dripped with blood. The stench of the dead was so strong that the sentries on duty had cotton pads soaked in carbolic tied to their noses. The score of murder on each train was about equal. More people were killed at Amritsar on those two trains than General Dyer had killed in Jallianwala Baug twenty-eight years ago, over which we moaned and squealed.

Who were all these people who were dying like flies all over Amritsar now? Whether Hindu or Moslem, they were still our own people. They were poor, unarmed, defenceless peasants. Their only crime was that they happened to belong to a different religion from those who butchered them. They were in the main homeless refugees running away from one side of the border to the other. Most of them were completely illiterate. They certainly had no political consciousness, and had never been concerned with issues like partition and boundaries, with democracy and freedom. They were unknown to the world as individuals. They were only counted in hundreds and thousands as one counted heads of cattle.

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Our government spokesmen often referred to "marauding bands" as if these bands were a normal feature of our Indian life. No one attempted to explain how these bands were suddenly to be found in our midst and how they had had access to arms and ammunition in such abundance.

It now transpires that long before August 15th unlicensed arms were freely distributed by interested parties. In at least one case so much ammunition was removed from a certain arsenal in India that a mock fire had to be staged in order to cover the inexplicable disappearance of arms. It is also common knowledge that the training of armed bands was encouraged by certain Indian princes, chiefly in the Northern states, who believed that with the moving out of the British there might be an opportunity to revive the monarchies of ancient India. A regular traffic in arms was

going on, conducted at its source by both British and Indian gun-runners. These gun-runners were moving about in the best of our social circles, were seen at the best of our clubs, hotels and even in the homes of the men who were our leaders.

Our leaders discounted stories which appeared in the Press about this gun-running. They called it yellow journalism. Meanwhile, our own soldiers, defending the refugees, were being killed by modern automatic firearms. The only people who were disarmed by government were the law-abiding. In the streets of Amritsar, within sight of the police and the military, ferocious-looking Sikhs carried threatening *kirpans* (long swords) and *bhalas*, which were short spears tied to nine-foot bamboo sticks. But in Bombay, the Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Leonard Stone, had to get special dispensation from the Home Department to be able to carry a walking stick. It did not make sense.

It was said that the Sikhs had to have their *kirpans* on religious grounds. No tenet of the Sikh religion could ever have justified what the same "religious" Sikhs did with these "holy" *kirpans*.

Indians first began to carry these unlicensed arms and to make ammunition soon after the "Quit India" resolution of the Congress in 1942. An undercurrent of violent opposition to British rule gained ground in the country. It by-passed the old method of resistance, which was to be non-violent and passive. Sections of the nationalist movement encouraged this short cut to freedom. The frustrated docile individual, the humble bank clerk, began to rip up seats in railway carriages as an expression of his demand for freedom. With freedom won, it was now difficult to get these same people out of the habit of lawlessness which they had been encouraged to form. A people awakened do not rest until all their hungers are appeased.

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"Smashed jaws, burst eyes, fractured limbs, crippled men, women and children are a kind of political argument that the twentieth century does not expect," the *Statesman* said about the Calcutta killings in 1946. This was one whole year before the civil war broke out in the Punjab.

All that happened in Calcutta in 1946 should have been a warning to the first free government of the two dominions which came into existence in 1947. Instead, many an inflammatory speech made by accredited Congress and Moslem leaders, even after the carnage began, fanned communal antipathy on more than one occasion, and neither government discredited these speeches or the persons who made them. The men who came into power in these two dominions had not got used to the idea that they were now two responsible governments, distinct from being two rival parties as in the days of the British.

One cannot toy with illiterate masses indefinitely and rouse them with inflammatory speeches and then expect them to switch off the fire kindled in them. Some of our own leaders, therefore, must take their full share of blame for the undeclared civil war. If a few of them subsequently changed their tone it was merely because they felt somewhat guilty that the blood of innocents was on their hands.

Soon there came a stage when in parts of the Punjab all organized forms of law, order and government came to an end. In several places only the law of the jungle prevailed. There were no human values left, no morality, not even the barest human decency. A fast and furious deterioration had set in.

In one of the local refugee camps a son was known to have disowned his dead mother. The old woman had died of cholera. The son sat beside her and watched her die. The woman was covered with a blanket, her only worldly possession. When she was dead, the son picked up the blanket from her body and walked away to another part of the camp. To his way of thinking he now had a load less to bear and a garment more with which to cover himself. When the corpse disposal corps arrived on the scene to carry away the dead mother, the boy denied that he ever knew her. He was afraid they would take the blanket away.

Such a thing has never happened in India before. These were the values which came with the civil war—the "disturbances".

Our Indian government promised to give the people more than they had received from the British. The people now

cried: "Give us even a roof over our head; give us only a bowl of rice; give us at least the safety of our lives."

The great Indian leaders could not give it to them. The truth was that they had not got anything to give. They had gambled for power with the lives of innocent people. Now these little innocent lives were paying the price of that power.

On the little airstrip at Adampur near Jullundur in East Punjab, I saw three Sikhs wandering aimlessly. They came up to us when they saw our Dakota land. They had never seen an aeroplane in their lives and wondered at this great bird which could even carry people.

The three Sikhs carried a small bundle at the end of the long bamboo which rested on the shoulder. It could not have weighed more than a pound. It represented what each had rescued before he fled. It was their all in all.

The youngest of the three had a piece of paper in his hand—a sheet torn from an ordinary exercise book. On that sheet he had got someone who could write to put down the items he had lost—two cows, a plough, a house, a wife, two children, ornaments, etc. Against each item, he had marked a price, obviously the cost of replacement, including that of his wife and children. The total figure of the loss came to the round figure of Rs. 4,500 (roughly 1,500 dollars or £300). I asked him what he was going to do with this sheet of paper. He said he was going to present it to his government.

"Which government?" I asked.

"*My* government," he replied.

The Air Force men who had gathered round us, listening to his talk, stood speechless. The Sikh looked at our faces one by one, for he sensed that his words had caused a silence. Then he muttered something to me in his dialect which I could not follow. One of the Air Force men translated it to me. The peasant had said: "Could you tell me where I can find this government to present my claim?"

I told him I did not know.

Time and again Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel and Mr. Jinnah had pledged their governments to safeguard the minorities. Of what use were these pledges uttered at high level in the two dominion capitals when neither government had the means to make them good?

I never thought a day would come when there would not be a single Moslem in a major Indian city of the north. That day came when I was in Amritsar. No Moslem had a hope of being alive in that fanatically Sikh stronghold. Similarly, across the border in the city of Lahore, no Sikh had a dog's chance in the midst of the Moslems. Yet not long ago Moslems and Sikhs had moved about freely with each other.

When the position of the minorities had deteriorated so far, when lawlessness and murder stalked the land, when the average civilian had no police to turn to for protection, it was a little too much to expect our people to rely on safeguards uttered by men who wisely lived far from the "disturbances".

I also never thought a day would come when I would have to enter a part of my erstwhile homeland, now the land of my neighbours, under the protection of a machine-gun, a Sten gun and a rifle. Yet that is how I entered Lahore.

I was in a jeep driven by a Hindu Brigadier who was second in command to the General. I ran into the Brigadier at the airport that evening and he offered to take me into Lahore (Pakistan) right away. I jumped at his offer and soon we were speeding down the Amritsar-Lahore road. It was a little before sundown; soon it would be dark and there was no telling who might take a shot at us on the road.

Ten years ago I had driven along this same road without any fear in my heart of Moslem, Hindu or Sikh. It was the week of Christmas, I remember. A crisp cold wind blew on my face. The world was at peace then. Now the mood had changed. This was no festive season. The hundreds of thousands of refugees who had walked this road in the last few weeks had left their tears along it.

For the first time I came to a frontier inside the land of my birth. I was feeling a sense of insecurity, even though our heavy escort was in deadly earnest.

We came to the frontier posts. First our own, at which we were smartly saluted. We drove on. The fifty yards ahead were no man's land, then came the Pakistan frontier. Military cars and personnel had right of way without hindrance, so we drove on with only a formal salute from the Moslem guard, grudgingly given. From a truck-load of Moslem

refugees entering their new homeland came feeble shouts of "*Pakistant zindabad*" (Long live Pakistan). There was a sigh in their tired voices.

It was darkening fast and when we reached the outskirts of Lahore the city lights were on. As we were all in army uniforms, we were a normal sight on this road. Our nationality did not obtrude. No one took much notice of us, except when in traffic our jeep slowed down. But as I looked over my shoulder at the three Indian soldiers who gave us cover, I could see their fingers move nearer to the trigger.

I asked the Brigadier why we needed so much protection. "It is better this way," he said. "It is better to proclaim the fact that we are fully armed. No one would try any nonsense once they see the Bren. I like to show it to them. So peace is easier held."

We now reached the residential area and the moon was rising in the sky. How beautiful this part of the country looked! This was the granary of India now torn away from us. We drove along the Upper Mall and turned into the imposing entrance of a huge estate, the former Residency, acres and acres of ground which once housed the Resident of the Punjab states. The property was now requisitioned by the Pakistan army for its senior personnel.

The Brigadier, being the Indian liaison officer to Pakistan, had a bungalow on this estate. We went in, washed and then went straight to a near-by mess for dinner.

We turned in early that night. We were very tired. I could hear the footsteps of the guards pacing up and down the verandah, giving us cover through the night. The Brigadier had told me these Maharatta guards were so good not even a rat could get through. I was not sure what he meant by a rat.

As I lay in bed I thought to myself: "When the British were here we were a nation in bondage. Now our nation is free but as individuals our people know no freedom at all. They are not free to move about their own land with any measure of safety, much less to move about in those parts of the country in which they are in a minority. They are not free from hunger, from fear, from all the scourges reminiscent of our bondage. What is the use of this theoretical freedom when we cannot realize the substance?"

Individuals seemed to have little meaning on this Punjab scene. Even groups in the lesser thousands were unimportant. One spoke vaguely of a refugee problem but few of us could visualize what it really meant. We said the masses were involved, but how many people were "the masses"?

Roughly speaking, it is now estimated, the Punjab refugee problem involved 10,000,000 people, the total of both sides. The proportion of east-going refugees was slightly higher than those going west, which was understandable in view of the difference in population figures of the communities involved. The proportion of Hindu to Moslem was roughly three to one.

The Brigadier told me that as on that day about 5,000,000 people were still on the wrong side of the border. These were very rough figures, for in the chaos which existed there was no means of estimating figures accurately. The situation was still too fluid and in any case it seemed to make very little difference to anyone if the figure was half a million less or more. The only safety man knew was the protection of his God.

There were three main ways in which refugees were moved; by military trucks, which regrettably were very few; by civilian transport; and on foot. M.E.O. confided to me the disgraceful fact that the government had only been able to mobilize 206 army trucks, during the critical first weeks, with which to evacuate 10,000,000 people. And yet it is estimated that during the war there were 31,000 army trucks in this country. What became of them? Where were they now?

On the way to Poona, 120 miles from Bombay, I had seen a whole army depot full of trucks rotting and idle. On Marine Drive, by the sea face in Bombay, army trucks could be seen still lying in their original packing cases. Trucks could be found outside the Taj Mahal hotel in Bombay and the Imperial in New Delhi, transporting men in uniforms and dinner jackets and women in pretty evening dresses. The advertising columns of our newspapers bore evidence to the thousands of these trucks which were sold in disposals auctions.

Yet in the hour of crisis, when the lives of ten million

people were involved, the government of India could only raise 206 from the whole country.

I found out later that many of these trucks were sold and shipped by Indian firms to the Dutch in Indonesia, and that our government had given the permission and the necessary export licence to allow them to be so shipped. And we were the people who sympathized with the "downtrodden Indonesians".

Civilian forms of transport were likewise limited. They were requisitioned from the area itself and therefore hardly sufficed to meet the emergency. The bulk of refugees, therefore, were compelled to move on foot and it was those foot convoys which formed the crux of the refugee problem. They provided the most fantastic scenes.

At one time a single convoy is said to have measured seventy-two miles in length. It came across the Sutlej river towards India. Some 90,000 people were seen trudging or riding in bullock carts. Those who saw this convoy said it was an unbelievable sight. Later, for the sake of control, it was broken up into smaller and more compact concentrations.

One of these huge convoys was reported to have arrived at the Balloki headworks some thirty-six miles north-west of Lahore. The Brigadier was to meet it the next day. I was going with him.

Early next morning a cup of sweetened army tea was brought in by a batman who clicked a salute. Soon we were shaved and washed and on the road to the headworks. There was little traffic on the road that morning. Occasionally we saw Moslems with bundles on their back walking in the same direction as we were driving. They had just come over the frontier and were pushing on away from the city towards the fields in search of an abandoned house in which they could make a new home for themselves. They never looked up from the road. They were engrossed in their thoughts.

The Balloki headworks were atop the Balloki dam. On the other side of the drawbridge was the convoy. We could smell it a mile away.

The bridge had been closed, for arrangements had not been made for escorting half a million across the more

dangerous Moslem-populated tracks. Packed like sardines this refugee column stretched fifteen miles. The great majority were on foot, some rode in bullock carts, a few rode on horses bareback. Many of these people had been on the road for two weeks. Those at the top of the queue had waited over a week for their turn to cross. Yet no cinema queue could have been more orderly. Each day only a few thousand were allowed over.

We drove several miles through the convoy. There was just enough room between the bullock carts and the people for our jeep to pass. That day I must have seen over 100,000 people. Their faces read like open books, telling me more than they could have said in words. It was a saga of sorrow.

I saw three corpses being carried away, the corpse-bearers brushing past our jeep. They were victims of cholera, I was told. Only these dead knew what it was to be at peace with the world.

This convoy was mainly of Sikh peasants and their families, a strong, sturdy type. Some of their women were very fair with well-formed bodies and well-chiselled features. The men were bearded and wore long hair. They looked at us silently. The women would sometimes sneak a glance and then shyly turn away. The kids followed our jeep. For them it was just a big holiday.

With cholera taking a heavy toll, the need for vaccines became very urgent. The people in the convoy were so resourceful they were willing to undertake vaccinating their whole crowd of half a million, if only vaccines were made available to them. "We have the syringes," an old V.C.O. said to the Brigadier. "Just send us the vaccines. That's all we ask."

The Brigadier promised he would do as much as he could. They believed him. "Now we have our own government," one of the men said. "They will send us help if you tell them of our plight. Our people are dying here. Soon winter will come. The old won't stand the road any more."

The Brigadier bade them have courage.

"Courage we have or else we'd never have been here. Sahib, courage we have and faith in God."

Two hours later when we turned back towards Lahore,

the Brigadier broke the silence and said: "What a price to pay for our freedom!"

He drove on for a while and turned to me again and said: "You'd better go straight back to Amritsar. Nobody believes half a million people can be on the road. These vaccines—they must have them. Tell them to send me what they can. To-morrow morning if possible. I'll run them down. Then go back soon to your paper and print all this you have seen. Nobody knows what's really happening here."

I knew then vaccines meant more to these people than my story meant to me, so I went to Amritsar the same evening. The Army was pleased to have news of this Balloki Head convoy which they had seen only from the air. They made notes of all I was able to tell them. The SOS for vaccines was immediately taken up by the Colonel in charge. The Army's medical officers gathered round the Colonel's table. They said they had been trying all day to locate the civil authorities to whom, according to a message from New Delhi, the vaccines had been sent.

Do you think a Civil Officer could be found in Amritsar at 7 p.m.? It was a hopeless search. Office hours were from 9 to 5. So it had been in the days of the British. So it was now. An administration worked according to rules and regulations no matter what the emergency.

I left the Colonel to his work, drove back to the house where I lodged. My host was glad to see me back. He was anxious for me as I had gone away without leaving a word.

Back at ten that night, the lights were still burning in HQ. The Colonel was deep in his files. The younger men around him were still locating those vaccines. The frustration they felt was written on their tired faces. They could do nothing without the vaccine. Here they were, working sixteen hours a day without a break, trying to save the lives of people and there was not an ampoule of vaccine to be had. Red tape required that vaccines for refugees should not be sent to the Army. The Army could only indent for vaccines for Army personnel. Refugees were civilian personnel. Vaccine for refugees, therefore, had to go through "the proper channels". Two urgent Service messages to New Delhi that night produced the laconic reply: "LARGE STOCKS OF VACCINE SENT TO CIVIL AUTHORITY,

AMRITSAR—AWAIT ARRIVAL." But no one on the civil side could tell the Army where that vaccine was.

About eleven that night the Colonel and I went over to the club next door for dinner. The General joined us there. We ate curried lamb and *chappatis* sitting round a table on the tennis court. All else was quiet for a while. Only the wail of the hungry came from the refugee camps in the distance. Their sighs dropped like dew all through the night.

The next morning they took me over in a Dakota to look at the convoy concentrations from the air. It had rained heavily in certain areas the whole night. We flew low, often at only 300 feet, though this was strictly against all regulations. But reconnaissance demanded the low flight, so the boys flew low.

From the air we saw whole convoys flooded out by the heavy rains. We could see the people living knee deep in water. With winter approaching many would just perish of cold and hunger. The plight of these millions was worsening daily. The meagre ration of food they had brought with them was fast diminishing. They had no hope of any more food until they crossed the border. Each government was preserving food for its own incoming refugees. There was little to spare for those who were going away.

Meanwhile, owing to the exodus, the crops had rotted on many a field in that erstwhile granary of ours. I was sure that for a long while there would be no harvest here, for nature does not sprout on blood-soaked fields. In the province richest in crops there appeared to be every likelihood of a famine.

Shortage of food, however, was the least of the refugees' hardships. In certain places, refugee trains had even been denied a drink of water. In the first year of our freedom men, women and children had died of thirst because water had been denied to them in a communal war. In one known instance a man in a train wet his parched lips with the blood of his murdered fellow passengers.

Such a thing had never happened in my country before.

The atrocities committed on women and children were the most horrible. Sworn statements, corroborated evidence, the testimony of witnesses, collected by rehabilitation officers, will some day reveal to what depths of degradation our

people sank. Sadism never expressed itself so filthily as in the two Punjabs where I saw with my own eyes women walking on the roads with blood on their *salvars* (trousers). Those who were raped have been many and there were many thousands who did not live to tell their tale.

Raping was not all. The perverted mind of man expressed itself in many ways. Dhanwantri, a reliable Indian social worker, in a pamphlet *Bleeding Punjab Warns* said:

"Hundreds of Moslem women were raped and abducted from Amritsar. There was even public raping of women. All humanity, all chivalry and decency seems to have gone."

That was on our side. Across the border, the same things were happening. Dhanwantri said:

"In the streets of Sialkot, Sikh and Hindu women were paraded naked in public and mass raping took place, the same as in Amritsar. The same thing was repeated in Sheikapura, where parents killed their own daughters to save them from dishonour."

There were several thousands of women, of whom many were young girls, who had no male relative or any relative they could find. Agents and pimps were already operating in these areas of the Punjab, buying girls as in the old Roman slave markets.

As I looked down through the window of the Dakota I could see on the ground below the dots and dashes which were our people—the free people of our new self-governed dominion—trudging along hard, sunbaked roads, hungry and parched, with their packs on their backs, dazed by the suddenness of it all, not knowing what the future held for them, away from the land they had lived on and loved—the flotsam and jetsam of a shipwreck washed on to strange shores. They could start a fresh life but they could never pick up the threads they had dropped. They would have to weave the patterns of their life anew.

Over the drone of the engine I could hear the old, British mocking laugh. Across the sky, which was dark and foreboding, I could see a South African finger of scorn.

That was my last day in Amritsar, for I decided I could do better work from the columns of the Press.

Early next morning I hopped a plane which took me to the capital. I landed at the military aerodrome at Palam. I

hitch-hiked into town, for there was no scheduled bus-service, no taxis or trams. I rushed to Air India's booking office only to be told that not a seat was available for thirteen days. I hopped a taxi to the airport. The boys of Air India put me on a plane. By evening I was back home, only to find that the Bombay newspapers were still speaking of the "disturbances".

"The City police have launched a fresh campaign against the *sutta* (illegal gambling) evil in Bombay," read a front page news-item in the evening's paper.

That night I went for drinks to Ed and Lee Clarke's.

For the first time in thirty-six years I got drunk.

IV

DISCOUNT FOR CASH

A NEW CLASS OF Indian now emerged on the Indian scene. He was the *khaddar*-clad, Gandhi-capped, black-marketeering patriot.

When the government of India, by a demonetization ordinance, recalled from circulation the high-denomination notes of Rs. 1,000 and over, a very severe blow was intended to be struck at those who had hoarded their black-market gains in these notes. In declaring them, the holders had to say how they came in possession of them. The object of the government was twofold: one, to catch the culprits of illegal transactions; two, to get them for evading income-tax.

The black-marketeers regarded this as rather rough treatment coming from their own government, and countered the move by finding buyers for their notes at approximately 700 rupees for every thousand. A lot of brisk trading went on and queues of people who had never seen a 1,000-rupee note in their lives were found declaring one or two which they all said they had won at the races the week before. No questions were asked of these little individuals for the government was after the big sharks, not the shrimps and tiddlers. In this way a large majority of these notes was re-converted at a small loss to the large holders.

Then at last the notes went off the market. The time limit had expired. The business in them was over.

One day a man called on me whom I knew but slightly. He was a dealer in one of the more profitable black-market lines. He had a story of bad luck to tell me and as I was "a man with a good heart" he thought I might induce one of "my many influential friends" to help an "unfortunate friend of his".

"What's it all about?" I asked.

"Well, it's like this," he said. "You remember that the government recalled high denomination notes?"

"Yes, but that was six months ago."

"Well, this friend of mine *forgot* to cash a few of his

notes. *Unluckily* he completely forgot about them. Now he doesn't know what to do with them. I thought that with all the people you know you could arrange to have them changed for him."

I told him it was very simple. All his friend had to do was to put his case before the Reserve Bank and explain how it happened. I felt sure the authorities would convert the notes for him, for it was never the intention of the government to deprive absent-minded and forgetful or old people of the odd notes they might have tucked away in the years gone by.

"How much is it?" I casually asked.

"Quite a bit," he said. "That is why it is so unfortunate . . . eh . . . about three hundred thousand rupees in all."

"Three lacs!" I exclaimed in surprise. "How can a man forget to cash three lacs of rupees?"

"Oh, he genuinely forgot. That much I can swear."

"But how can any man forget to cash such a large sum? It's just ridiculous."

"You see, a lot of people made lacs and crores of rupees during the war. He was one of them. Now there was no point in making all this money when the income tax would take it all away. So you could not bank it. It had to be kept in cash in the house. This friend of mine made over three crores (thirty million) rupees. How was he to keep it? What he did was this: every time he made two, three or five lacs of rupees he would buy a little tin money box and fill it up with high denomination notes, and he would hide the box somewhere in his house. Some of these boxes were kept at home, a few in his office, in cupboards, under the bed and in all sorts of places where people least suspected money would be kept. When the ordinance came, my friend brought out these money boxes in order to convert the notes. In all the excitement he forgot about one of these money boxes. This is the one which contains these notes. He only discovered the box a week ago."

"That is bad luck," I ventured, but my sarcasm was lost, for he earnestly agreed with my remark.

We then got down to brass tacks. The proposition, as put to me, ran somewhat as follows: that I find one of my "influential" friends to undo the bad luck at half price. He

was not concerned with the methods I would use, he was merely concerned with the cash. "Five hundred rupees for a thousand is a very fair offer," he added.

I asked him then what use these notes would be to any man who bought them.

It was then that I learnt that almost anything could be done if one knew the right people. It was only because he and his friend were "poor, insignificant individuals" that they found it difficult to get away with these transactions, which were only technically incorrect! He knew people were doing it all the time in certain high circles. He told me that a certain bank manager on the morning of the demonetization ordinance had rung up some of his better clientèle to inform them that if he could be of any assistance to them in changing these notes, they should not hesitate to ask. He told me that a certain maharajah was converting notes for his friends through the state treasury and that a certain high priest was declaring them as religious property.

"How do you think, Mr. Karaka, all these Congress patriots, who have had no big business for the last twenty years, are suddenly able to live in such an expensive manner and to become big business men overnight?"

"Are you suggesting," I asked, "that all these men who helped the fight for freedom are now trading in patriotism?"

"There are, of course, many exceptions, but the facts speak for themselves. Otherwise where did all this money come from?"

That was the first time my attention was drawn to the presence in our midst of this new type of business man, the one who traded in nationalism, patriotism and like commodities.

V

DEATH OF THE MAHATMA

THE YEAR HAD JUST turned. It was now January 1948. The fury of the civil war was abating and the first hesitant signs of confidence were manifest in the life of the country. The blood-thirst of communal hatred seemed quenched. Some sanity had come to our people. Perhaps they had had enough of killings. The chaos had only caused more hunger, more suffering, and the average man was rallying round the tottering pillars of law and order, for in that way alone there seemed to be a hope of salvation.

In Bengal, which had been the scene of the most bitter communal hatred, Mahatma Gandhi had wrought "what was virtually a miracle". The words were those of Ian Stephens, editor of *The Statesman*, in a personal letter to me. To such an enlightened man as the editor of *The Statesman* it seemed inexplicable in any other way, for the situation Mahatma Gandhi had tackled was no ordinary political crisis. It was a holy war.

From that mission in Bengal, Mahatma Gandhi had come to New Delhi which was now humming with political activity and intrigue. There was a "gold rush" in New Delhi and every opportunist was on the scene for his share of the loot. Post-dated cheques on the Bank of Sacrifice were now being presented. Patriots were cashing in.

Gandhi stood aloof from this sordid scene. Living in the palatial New Delhi residence of the multi-millionaire Birla, he built a wall of seclusion around himself. He disentangled himself from the routine of administrative detail and sat down quietly to plan the future for the country and the Congress. He was concerned with principles on which the new India was to be founded, not with the appointments of individuals. He had, moreover, dedicated himself to the greater task of bridging the widening gulf between the brute majority, conscious of its brute force, and the frightened minorities. Peace was his goal, but not the artificial peace enforced by the police and the military at the point of the

sword. To make this peace possible he became an even more resolute champion of the underdog and the minority. He took upon himself the delicate task of pointing a finger at some of his own followers. He exposed their religious hypocrisy, of which he had by then become aware. While in no way minimizing the atrocities committed by Moslems in Pakistan on the trapped and fleeing Hindus, he brought to light the not-so-well-known fact that the Hindus and Sikhs in India had been equally cowardly with regard to the Moslem minorities trapped here. Gandhi had persisted in defending the Moslems without relenting. Likewise, at the prayer meetings which he held every evening—a ritual of his later years—he continued to include recitations from the *Koran*, the holy book of the Moslems, side by side with recitations from the *Bhagwad Gita*, the Hindu scripture. To Gandhi God was universal and therefore prayers too, whether Hindu or Moslem, were beyond political differences.

But the rank and file of unenlightened Hindus did not share that higher thinking of his. To them the Mahatma's behaviour appeared somewhat tactless and impolitic. But giving in to this section of Hindus would have ushered in mob rule in the place of order and government.

As a result of these repeated challenges to Mahatma Gandhi's utterances and actions, he was advised to take greater care of his person. The government of India offered him the necessary protection, an armed personal escort. But Gandhi would not agree to be shadowed. He had climbed to the pinnacle of public acclaim by the sheer love of the people and he could not, consistently with his own beliefs, now depend for his safety on weapons and armed guards whose very existence he despised. To accept armed protection would have made a mockery of his whole struggle, his ideals, his non-violence, his theory of "Love conquers all".

The first sign of danger was the explosion of a crude bomb at one of his prayer meetings in Birla House. The hand behind it was that of the R.S.S. which was making a desperate bid for power in the chaos that prevailed. Unfortunately the Congress ministers in some of the provinces and in the capital had not taken the R.S.S. sufficiently seriously. For instance, in Amritsar in the worst days of the civil war, when public meetings were banned and when

even the Congress volunteers working for restoration of law and order were forbidden to gather, I saw the R.S.S. hold a rally some 5,000 strong. This rally took place not more than a quarter of a mile from the army HQ. I remember an army officer pointing out the absurdity of such a rally being allowed by the civil administration when it was at these R.S.S. rallies that the germ of communal hatred was being sown. Again, in Bombay, a provincial government, which had refused permission to a harmless meeting of secondary school teachers, gave special dispensation to the R.S.S. to hold a rally.

The inference could thus be drawn that either the Congress was too sure of its influence over the masses and too smug about its newly-acquired power and therefore dismissed too lightly the danger underlying the existence of a body like the R.S.S., or—which was also likely—certain sections of the Congress, overtly pledged to suppress all forms of communalism, were secretly encouraging the Hindu bias which was the driving force of the R.S.S.

The real Hindu fanatics of the R.S.S., who thought no price was too high to pay for a Hindu-dominated state, were aware of this secret sympathy towards them. They traded on the soft spots in the administration, and so became more confident that they could operate unchallenged to achieve their goal. It made the planning of a campaign of pan-Hinduism easier. They even threatened Mahatma Gandhi and challenged his sympathy and understanding of the Moslems at many a R.S.S. meeting. They miscalculated the determination of Mahatma Gandhi, however, for he refused to change because of their threats. Misguidedly, also, the R.S.S. became so confident of themselves and of the influence they were gaining in parts of the country that they believed that in a clash, even with the Mahatma, they would now be able to carry the country with them and exterminate the Moslems and their sympathizers.

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi followed. It was the direct result of the leniency given to the R.S.S. by the government itself. The government of Bombay now found it difficult to laugh off the permission it had given to the R.S.S. when it had denied it to the secondary school teachers. And the fact emerged that more than one member of that

government had been warned by a Bombay college professor of the plot to assassinate the Mahatma. This professor came and told me a few months later how he had gone personally to them and informed them of the conversation which he is alleged to have had with these young R.S.S. men who were said to have confided their political goal to him. As a reward for his timely warning, the professor was threatened with arrest.

So it happened, as the professor had said; a Hindu fanatic, a member of the R.S.S., travelled all the way from the Bombay province to the capital and went to the evening prayer meeting at Birla House. As Mahatma Gandhi walked through the garden, leaning on the shoulders of two of his granddaughters, the assailant stepped forward, drew out a pistol and fired three shots at point blank range. Mahatma Gandhi fell and in a few moments, with the name of God on his lips, he died. The blood from his frail body dripped on to the land he had made free. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, father of the nation and chief architect of its freedom, died at the hands of an ungrateful countryman of his. The arch-apostle of non-violence had fallen a victim to violence.

* * * * *

More than a man had passed away on that cold January evening in the capital city of India. The years of struggle, in which he had groomed, mobilized and led a nation to freedom, had ended. When he had fulfilled his destiny, he was swept away from the sordid Indian political scene in circumstances which compelled the attention of the world.

At one stroke the curtain was lifted in the minds of men, revealing the power of this frail little man, so often portrayed in a loin cloth, a halter in his hand. His struggle for freedom had, through the years, drawn together the various strands of our national, political and economic life.

At first it appeared as though he had only been a political force in the country. It was in politics that he first made his mark. He was the original agitator against the racial discrimination which the Indian experienced in South Africa. He was then only a lawyer with a brief. Gradually he became a crusader, urged by a righteousness which be-

came a cause. Later he came to India to see the wider implications of that same discrimination meted out to his people in their own land. He felt the frustration of being ineffective, battling against the might and power of an empire. He felt his spirit being defeated when at the early stages the people regarded him as something of a crank because of the odd things he said and did and preached. To achieve his political objectives he made salt by the seashore; he fasted; he stripped himself of his normal attire and went round the country in a loin cloth; he evolved a cap to which he gave special political significance and decreed that homespun should be the only garment worn. These seemingly futile ideas were the raw material of his movement of passive resistance with which he hoped to overthrow the British *raj*.

All this came to pass. His people made salt by the seashore to resist the salt tax; each time he fasted he gained his point; he revealed the growing power he wielded; his scanty attire made him a symbol of the poverty of his people; *khaddar* and the Gandhi-cap came to be regarded as the symbol of resistance to the British.

By 1921 the national movement had gathered a momentum the pulse of which could be felt all through the country. To the various political demands which Indians made in a haphazard manner, he brought a sense of cohesion. He unified and united the various communities, sects and religions into a people. He showed the British government the power that was gathering behind him. He dared to hoist the tricolour of the Indian National Congress in places where only the Union Jack had flown before. With his passive resistance and his capacity to endure the brutal report of the administration he broke through the smug complacency of the *raj*. In time he created a permanent spirit of resistance towards the British in India. It was this spirit of resistance, which he nurtured and kept alive through the various civil disobedience movements, which made it possible for us to achieve independence in our lifetime.

Mistakes he made, and many. He had himself referred to his "Himalayan blunders". His more severe critics could enumerate a number of occasions on which he missed his opportunity. They could point to his inherent limitations.

He had been out-pointed in many an encounter. More astute statesmen had scored easily off him. At the Round Table Conference in London he was almost a misfit and his performance was classed as mediocre, for he was ill-equipped with facts and figures and his arguments were too easily demolished by those on the other side. At the conference table of the world Mahatma Gandhi did not carry the weight which he did with his people at home. He lacked not only showmanship and personality, but also the background and material which others had who represented their countries at such conferences. The trouble was that Gandhi was part saint, part politician and part naked *fakir*. Yet India still clung to him for, more than any other Indian of our time, it was Mahatma Gandhi who created in the Indians a realization of their inferior political status and gave expression to the urge for freedom which arose within them. That was his basic worth. His judgement on several points of individual detail may have been wrong, but the main direction which he gave to the people, the sincerity with which he gave it and his unrelenting perseverance to reach his goal were the most powerful factors which brought about our eventual liberation. Rightly, therefore, when he died was he called "Father of the Nation".

To men of cold logic, there were many inconsistencies in Gandhian philosophy, but Gandhism in India was not only a process of mind. It was rather a blind faith supported by the belief that he alone, in his inimitable way, would lead us to our goal.

No one, for instance, could accept his reading or his conclusions on World War II. It was difficult to accept his theory that the non-violent way of resisting which was succeeding against the British would have succeeded equally well against the Japanese. He seemed to miss the meaning and implication of the Nazi idea, nor did he understand the depths of its perversion. He believed that all that was said about Hitler's Germany was just so much British propaganda. He thought the Japanese were only fellow Asiatics striving to liberate themselves and find expression for their nationalism, even as we Indians were. Perhaps it was his naïveness; perhaps it was his limitation.

So long as the main question of our freedom remained

unsolved, we were hesitant to pick holes in Gandhi's reasoning; so long as the fight lasted no one was willing to concede these weaknesses in his philosophy. We preferred to gloss over them, even though they were apparent to many. In our fight for freedom he was the standard-bearer. Likewise there were several little fads and foibles of his—such as prohibition, a celibacy of living, a drive against gambling and meat-eating and other such typically ascetic attitudes of his towards the normal incidents of everyday life—with which one did not agree yet did not quibble about. No one opposed him on those occasions when, in the Congress party meetings, he passed resolutions on them. These personal whims of his were appreciated as being part of the ascetic and were obscured by the greater gnawing hunger of the people for freedom from oppression, which was in the forefront of his philosophy.

But the Gandhi who was essentially a politician gradually faded into the background as the years rolled on, and when freedom came, an amazing transformation came over the man, for he revealed himself in that role for which he had been groomed by destiny. He emerged as a selfless leader who taught his people that sacrifice should have no material reward and that the years he had spent within the dingy prison walls were not to be compensated by a life in gilded palaces which was now within his grasp. Instead he preferred to carry on the unfinished, greater work of teaching his countrymen that the freedom of India came from within India and meant something more than freedom from the British. It also meant freedom for the people from hunger, fear, intimidation and want; freedom from the barriers which created the "outcasts"; freedom also from the petty hatreds arising out of superstition, prejudice, fetishes and fanatic communalism that had eaten into our people. So that at the height of his triumph and his glory, when all India gloated over the political victory scored over the British, Gandhi rather ashamedly retired into himself, fasted as a mark of humiliation, and then dedicated himself to the unfinished work of teaching his people the qualities of generosity and tolerance, of which there was little evidence in the country.

He had seen it with his own eyes, in the villages of

Bengal which he had tramped. He had seen the frightened look in the eyes of those Moslems who were trapped in Hindu majority areas and who, but for his presence, would have known certain death. He witnessed his own co-religionists flinging stones at him at his prayer meetings. He had heard with his own ears the cries of revenge which the Hindus uttered against the seceding Moslems. He realized then that while the British overlord had been conquered it was more than likely that his place would be taken by the same variety of individual which had sprung from the land itself. British imperialism could not, in his opinion, be replaced by a pan-Hindu fascism, and the rule of an oligarchic class, anxious to safeguard its vested interests, could not now be supplanted by that of Hindu fanatics whose sole idea was to feather their own nests. So Gandhi stepped aside, as the curtain began to rise on free India, and let others take the bow. In the hour of his triumph he was more humble than ever and for the first time his severest critics had to concede the sincerity of the man, his utter selflessness.

The philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, therefore, took shape in the months after freedom became a reality when, almost alone, at his prayer meeting each evening he preached the gospel of liberty, truth and non-violence. Nothing that he had uttered in his whole political career could bear comparison with the home truths he uttered to his own people. They often embarrassed the top-ranking Congress leaders who were inclined to compromise on these issues with the needs of the hour. But Gandhi would yield no principle of his. He would not deny liberty to that minority which had got trapped in Hindu India. That, perhaps, was his greatest achievement, greater than the freedom he won for his people. Defending that principle he died.

Looking back on it now, I feel he could have died no other death.

* * * * *

Turning over the columns of the Press in the days following his death I can now read more dispassionately the comments which came from all parts of the world. Two

messages stood out for their grace and chivalry because of the sources from which they came. From the Prime Minister of Great Britain, a country which Gandhi had fought all these long years, came the generous tribute of Clement Attlee: "No man has played a greater part in his country's history. . . . His loss will be mourned by countless thousands in all walks of life, in every country of the world."

The other came from Field Marshal Smuts, the Prime Minister of South Africa, where Gandhi first "experimented with truth". On the racial issue this country was still at war with us, but Smuts acknowledged: "A prince among men has passed away and we grieve with India in her irreparable loss."

In contrast to the grace shown by the British and South African Prime Ministers on this occasion, there came the comment of Quaid-E-Azam Jinnah, then Governor-General of Pakistan. Prefacing his remarks by saying that there could be no controversy in the face of death, Jinnah referred to Mahatma Gandhi as "one of the greatest men produced by the *Hindu* community". Mr. Jinnah sympathized *with the Hindu community*! It would have been more appropriate if the Moslem leader had sympathized also with the Moslems for befriending whom Mahatma Gandhi had paid with his life.

The Moslem masses, however, showed no such petty bias on this occasion. In true Islamic fashion they showed by their conduct and behaviour that they were capable of paying respect to a man whom they regarded as their own. They wept for him as the Indians did. A Pathan in Pakistan was seen kneeling before Gandhi's statue in Karachi. It was a Moslem's unstinted tribute to Mahatma Gandhi.

There was one other discordant note which came from a source least expected, the Soviet Union. Public attention was first drawn to it by "The Chronicler", in the *Bombay Chronicle*. He pointed out that condolence messages had come to the people of India from all over the world, from Abyssinia, America, Brazil, China, Denmark, England, Finland, Greece, Holland, Ireland, Japan—alphabetically all the way down to Zanzibar, from kings and peasants, from heads of political organizations and cultural associations, literary academies and universities, from savants and

scholars, from philosophers and poets, musicians and singers. Even the flag of the United Nations had been lowered to half mast at Lake Success, but no message had come from the Soviet Union, from Stalin or from Molotov. While the world mourned the loss of Mahatma Gandhi as a loss to the world itself, Moscow radio was content to refer to the death of "a well-known Indian". The Kremlin was silent. Later, the Soviet News Agency, TASS, said that condolences had been sent to the Indian government through the proper diplomatic channels, but, even if that were so, Gandhi's death was hardly a commonplace diplomatic incident. Whatever may have been the exchange of diplomatic courtesies, as far as the people of India were concerned the Russians had offered no sympathy.

"The Chronicler" said: "Gandhi's place in history is assured even without a tribute from Stalin . . . but the Friends of the Soviet Union in India (and I have so far counted myself among them) will find it hard to live down the unforgivable lack of grace and the execrable bad manners displayed by the Soviet government on this occasion."[1]

Nearer home, the best expression of the nation's sorrow came appropriately from the Indian Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, whom Gandhi had nominated as his political heir. His voice choked with emotion, Nehru broadcast to the nation: "The light that shone in this country was no ordinary light . . . a thousand years from now it will still be seen here and the world will see it. It will give solace to innumerable masses, for that light represents something more than the immediate present. It represents the living truth."

While the head of our government rose fully to the occasion, our Press, whose columns Gandhi had fed for over a quarter of a century with the thrilling story of the national struggle, failed lamentably to do justice to the man and the moment. Many of our Indian newspapers were content with a cold chronological piece, rehashed from the newspaper "morgues", interspersed with a little pious moralizing. As a result, millions of Indian readers were left hungry for the little details of that sad human story. Perhaps the Indian

[1] *Bombay Chronicle,* February 8th, 1948.

journalists were too dazed themselves to be able to express the feeling of the moment and the depths of the nation's sorrow.

There was, however, one exception. The girl editor of a woman's paper, *Eve's Weekly*, produced the following beautiful lines:

"Gandhiji was more than a leader. To all his people he was their faith; to the hungry and naked he gave succour, comfort to those in pain, and in all our hearts he awoke pride in India. Above all, he gave us a name."

No other editor in India had remembered to say that, yet that was our greatest debt to him.

About this time I received a letter from a young English girl, not more than nineteen years of age, whose father had worked long years in India in the civil service. It was just a personal letter to me but in it she related how she had attended the funeral and what she had felt at the time. To me she seemed to have captured that feeling of the moment which I had missed in the Press messages of that time. She wrote:

"We have been living through some very dramatic events here. This last week seems rather like a strange dream. I had planned to go to the prayer meeting on the very day the Mahatma was assassinated, but decided not to go at the last minute. Thank God I didn't. I would have so hated to have seen the tragedy.

"I was having tea in the next road but never heard a thing until I got the news on the B.B.C. at 6 o'clock.

"From the roof of the High Commissioner's Office the next morning I saw the procession coming out of Birla House but even now it is somewhat of a blur in my mind because of the things I saw that afternoon, when two friends took me down to join the crowds by the banks of the river.

"There must have been a million people gathered there —a sea of faces stretching to the horizon. It was like a nightmare brought to reality by the dust, the smells and the jostling and shoving of the masses. We managed to get through the armed guards into the cleared space in the centre.

"It was a curious feeling walking across the sunny grass

watched by the thousands of patiently-waiting people. We joined the few people who were squatting in the dust a couple of yards from the pyre which consisted of a stone platform with a pile of wood on top.

"It was very peaceful sitting there and the crowds were strangely silent until Mountbatten, his staff, and three or four lovely ladies, in hats, arrived. They joined us sitting cross-legged in the dust and soon after, the crowd, which had been stirring uneasily, suddenly burst into a roar, and through the haze I saw that Gandhiji's bier, surrounded by the thousands who had followed the procession from Birla House, was entering the arena. .

"The frail little body was lifted on to the pyre, after that things became rather confused; the crowd surged forward, breaking through the cordon of air-force men, and complete pandemonium broke loose.

"I remember seeing Pandit Nehru, his face drawn with emotion, standing on the pyre trying to stop the crowd, Mountbatten leaping to his feet, a distraught woman being held down by a policeman, and looking over my shoulder I saw a mass of people pressing down on us.

"It is no pleasant feeling seeing a crowd like that advancing on one when there is no means of escape. I have never been so frightened in my life. My friend grabbed hold of me, and together we scrambled over a pile of sandalwood and cocoanut which the priests were preparing for the pyre, to the further side where, for a brief moment, the advancing crowd appeared to have been stopped.

"Many people wrote of the chaos as though it were a glorious ending to the saint, but my feelings at the time were very different. To me it seemed the most disgusting disregard for the sacred rites and the most unpeaceful ending for the greatest peace-lover of our time."

The behaviour of the Indian people on the occasion of the Mahatma's death was far from uniform. In parts of the country it was exemplary; in other parts it was even disgraceful.

In the hours immediately following the news of Gandhi's death, mob violence broke out in Bombay, and probably in other cities, on the assumption that he must have been killed by a Moslem. Wisely, the government of India quickly announced the fact that the assassin was a Hindu. It soon became evident that his death was being used by

certain anti-social elements as an excuse for vandalism, which was becoming a habit with them.

These unseemly incidents, however, seemed to be restricted to the big cities, New Delhi, Bombay, and others. The people, the agricultural masses, the farmers, the peasants and simple country folk of India, were perfect examples of that fine Indian character which is this country's heritage.

The *Times of India*'s special correspondent, who witnessed the ceremony of the consigning of the ashes to the sacred *sangam* at Prayag, wrote (February 12th, 1948): *"No king or popular leader in the world's history could have received greater homage than the touching tribute paid by the Indians to the mortal remains of Mahatma Gandhi on their journey to the sacred Sangam at Prayag.*

"All along the 500-mile railtrack from New Delhi to Allahabad and then along the five-mile route from Allahabad railway station to the Sangam, it was a triumphant progress.

"Whether in the day or in the wintry night, simple villagers and peasants, men, women and children flocked alongside in their hundreds and sought 'darshan' and cast flowers and garlands on the richly bedecked urn bearing the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi and stood with bowed heads and joined hands as the cortège passed by."

So he went his lonely way. The man who from a minor disturbance had become a Mahatma had now become immortal in the minds and hearts of the Indian people.

He had given us freedom. Out of dust he had made us into men. He had given us individuality; he had also given us a name.

VI

FROM COLUMNIST TO EDITOR

THE END OF 1947 had seen unexpected changes in my own affairs. While those changes were personal to me, they had a direct bearing on the changes that were taking place in the country. By a strange combination of circumstances I became the focal point of that growing but till then inarticulate section of Indian public opinion which believed that the Congress in power was virtually creating a dictatorship in the country.

It happened like this: I returned home one evening in November to receive a letter from the management of the *Bombay Chronicle* giving me a month's notice for the termination of my service. The letter was the result of a management v. labour dispute which had reached a climax and, in order to safeguard their position, the management had given notice to the entire staffs of the group of papers which they controlled.

Within the next few weeks this dispute was resolved and the notices to the staff withdrawn, but in the meantime I had applied for leave to take stock of my position and think out my future. I had come to the conclusion that I would not go back to the *Bombay Chronicle* as a columnist. My association with that paper, which had lasted for over nine years, I brought abruptly to an end.

My main urge had always been to have a paper of my own which I could control and edit and which would stand out and fight for the things I believed in.

The one important factor at the time which made me so emphatic about my decision to leave the *Chronicle* and branch out on my own was a strong spiritual influence in which I believe, based on a personal faith which is not translatable into words. But for this faith, I would not have given up the *Chronicle* job at a time when conditions in the country were so chaotic that there appeared to be nothing ahead of me.

It was no ordinary coincidence that I should have gone to the Managing Director to hand in what was virtually my resignation from the *Chronicle* and come out, an hour later, with the idea of a new paper crystallized, of which I was to be the editor and in which my erstwhile employers were to become my partners.

Ten weeks later, on a Wednesday—March 24th, 1948—a new weekly paper appeared on the streets of Bombay. It was called *March*.

In the early weeks I gathered a young and raw team of untried but enthusiastic workers who stayed up with me in the office late into the night. Twenty pages of four columns each, tabloid size, seemed an awful lot of space to fill in those first weeks, when a letter to the editor was quite an event in our humble office, a cubicle ten feet by eight. As we struggled for recognition we would report to each other every Wednesday morning if we had seen anyone reading a copy of the paper. It gave us a childlike thrill.

Then, in the fifth week of publication, we were overwhelmed by the scramble for copies which took place. Our bannerline that week read: "THE PEOPLE SAY CONGRESS WORSE THAN THE BRITISH."

No one had said such a thing in India before.

Within a few hours the news-stalls were sold out and a few newsboys were selling their remaining copies at four times the price.

The bannerline was based on a letter which Mahatma Gandhi had received a few days before his death. He had referred to it at one of his last prayer meetings and confessed that it had worried him very much. The letter had even been printed in some newspapers in India but no one had drawn such pointed attention to it. Nor had anyone stressed the importance of this growing feeling of discontent among the people towards the Congress.

This letter addressed to Mahatma Gandhi was from an aged Congressman from the province of Andhra, an old man of eighty, a tried and tested Congress worker, who had been with the party from the very beginning. The letter, therefore, had a special significance. The writer's name was Konda Venkatappayya, a South Indian name.

Venkatappayya had written to Gandhi:

"Swaraj was the only absorbing passion which goaded men and women to follow your leadership. But now that the goal has been reached all moral restrictions have lost their power on most of the fighters in the great struggle. . . . The situation is growing more intolerable every day. The people have begun to say that the British government was much better. THEY ARE EVEN CURSING THE CONGRESS."

The Mahatma was aware of the unimpeachable source from which it came. But he died too soon after, and no one in the Congress high command referred to that letter again. The appearance of this indictment on the front page of *March* in the bold black type in which we presented it caused a veritable sensation. Our comments echoed the discontent of honest men.

It was not so long ago that every Indian heart beat for the Congress. In the darkest days of our struggle it had lighted the path to freedom. Yet within a year "the people are cursing the Congress". The reason was that while the Congress-in-opposition fought oppression, the Congress-in-office had turned out to be worse oppressors. The British denied us political freedom for the sake of their vested interests, but the Congress were destroying every shred of freedom. They were even killing the freedom of the human soul.

It was a lone fight from that small office cubicle in Red House, Elphinstone Circle, Bombay 1. It brought on us the wrath and vengeance of the men in power whom we had the "audacity" to challenge and criticize. It brought harassment, arrests and charges, such as no democratic government has ever been known to make against the Press. We became marked men who had to be cautious of every step we took and every line we wrote. The tread of policemen's boots in our corridors was a familiar sound. But with all this we became the focal point of that straightforward, constitutional opposition which was not afraid to speak out the truth about a government which, satiated with power, by its brute majority has used and abused its emergency powers to crush all opposition.

So, week by week, while I edited *March*, I told the story

of a people who had been betrayed by the very men who led them to freedom. It has been a sad story but it had to be told.

NOTE

It was that same faith that made me resign from *March*, the paper I had founded, to start my new paper *The Current*, which in these few months is already widely read throughout the country. The form in which I express myself may change, but the faith remains.

VII

THE FRONT CHANGES

As a result of the communal war, the chaotic conditions in the country and the complete breakdown of the forces of law and order, a state of emergency had to be declared in India. The governments of both the Centre and the provinces acquired wide powers to deal with this emergency by means of various Public Security Measures Acts, which, while they varied slightly in individual provinces, generally gave the executive arbitrary powers above the normal law of the land.

Under this emergency legislation a very minor official of the police could arrest a man without a warrant. The government could detain an individual without assigning a reason if, in their opinion, he constituted a danger to the public security. This detention could remain unquestioned for a fortnight, after which the government had to assign a reason but not necessarily bring him to trial. Moreover, the right of the judiciary to intervene on behalf of the individual was set aside. The individual, however wrongfully or mistakenly he may have been detained, had no redress in law against the officials who had deprived him of his liberty. His liberty was no longer an inherent right. It was at the mercy of the executive and of those police officials, as small as sub-inspectors of police, to whom those powers were delegated.

A man could be snatched away from his home by a sub-inspector of police and be locked up for fifteen days without any known rhyme or reason. At the end of that time he could still be kept in detention by a mere statement of the government that his being at large was detrimental to public security and the maintenance of law and order. Once the executive authority had declared itself so satisfied, there was nothing the courts of law could do to give back to that man his lost liberty or, in some provinces, compel the government even to bring the individual to trial.

So long as the communal war lasted and the lives of

millions of individuals were at stake, no one, except a sort of conscientious objector on the grounds of abstract democracy, could deny the need for some such powers being assigned to the executive.

But the civil war, sporadic in nature, did not continue unabated. A time soon came when the government and the civic authorities regained sufficient grip on the situation, and normal conditions gradually returned to most parts of the country, with only an occasional knifing or sniping to disturb the peace. Even so, a large section of responsible opinion agreed with the government that in view of the past experience it was perhaps advisable that these far-reaching powers should still remain in the hands of the government for a while. We had a people's government in office, it was argued, and everyone should have faith that these powers would not be abused.

Congress ministers, it was said from many a platform, were servants of the people. different from the British despots of a past era. The Congress would not betray the people.

Not many months had elapsed when news, which had hitherto been censored, began to trickle into our newspaper offices of odd things that had happened under these new powers. It was alleged by many a victim that he who was clearly innocent had been victimized only for holding views opposed to the local administration or its individual members.

This was a grave charge and at first difficult to believe. But the instances multiplied and they were impossible to ignore. The government-sponsored Press still regarded everything the Congress did as above reproach and unquestionably for the good of the land. It was left to small papers like ours to dig into these various instances and find out how much truth there was in the allegation that these emergency powers were now being abused.

The main target of the government's silent offensive appeared to be directed against Communists, some left-wing Socialists, trade union leaders and, finally, against all those who were outspoken critics of the Congress. Of course the powers were still used to a certain extent against the occasional rioter, but the main current seemed diverted to

political objects instead of being used only against communal agitators.

When an unfair arrest was so glaring as to attract the attention of a naïve newspaper reporter, he trustingly brought it to the notice of the government. It was then that the cards began to be laid on the table. No move was made to undo the injustice done. Instead, the government showed a reluctance to act in the democratic manner expected of them. The story of our betrayal then broke. The power was in the hands of the few and those few were hanging on to it grimly. The wider the power, the more complete the domination.

To my office there came on the afternoon of May 27th a tall elderly Indian, *khaddar*-clad, Gandhi-capped. He gave his name as Lekhraj Sharma. He said his home town was Ajmere in the north of India. He spoke in Hindustani to me but he could understand English. He put before me two letters which he carried with him. They were intended to establish his identity and to guarantee his authenticity. The first letter bore the official letter-head of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, was dated January 20th, 1948, and was signed by the President of that same Congress Committee, the party boss in Bombay. It was addressed to a doctor of a leading hospital in Bombay. It read:

"My Dear Dr. Dhayagude,

Mr. Lekhraj Sharma of Ajmere, who is a friend of mine, telephoned me this morning that his son, Sham Sunder, is a patient in your hospital in bed No. 3, ward 22. I do not know what he is suffering from. *Lekhraj is a prominent Congressman and a friend of ours.* Please see that he gets all the assistance he needs.

With kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

(sd.) S. K. Patil."

The second letter was from another important Congressman, at one time a leading city father. In that letter Lekhraj Sharma was described as "a staunch Congressman".

Lekhraj Sharma then told his story.

He said he had been a member of the Congress since 1919, had been through every movement of Mahatma Gandhi,

and had spent the best years of his life in jail in the national cause. As recently as in 1946/47 he had been the enrolling officer of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee.

More recently he had helped the president of that same provincial committee to improve his Hindustani. He had also tutored other leading Congressmen in their own language.

Now it appeared that a week after the president of the Bombay Congress had given Sharma the above certificate, Sharma had offended this stiff-necked Congress official by filing his own nomination paper for the Bombay municipal elections in opposition to the official Congress candidate nominated by President S. K. Patil himself. This was undoubtedly an affront to Mr. Patil's authority. It was an independence of attitude which was to be discouraged!

Sharma had gone further and published a pamphlet in Hindustani in which he stated his reasons for standing in opposition. That was very tactless.

On February 7th, exactly seventeen days after S. K. Patil had certified Sharma as "a prominent Congressman and a friend of ours", Sharma found himself arrested by the Bombay city police during the series of arrests that followed Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. He was taken to the head C.I.D. office, where he was interviewed. Sharma said that here he was beaten up by a police inspector, who pushed his knee into his back, pulled his moustache, knocked off his Gandhi cap and trampled on it.

Four days later, Sharma received a notice from the police in which he was informed that the order for his detention had been made under the Security Measures Act. The police volunteered the grounds that he was communal-minded and had incited his followers to acts of violence against members of the rival community, that he was "distributing sweets to celebrate the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi". Therefore, his being at large was prejudicial to the public safety and the peace of greater Bombay. Sharma went on a fast and refused food and water. His attitude brought an assurance from the C.I.D. that his allegations against the police official would be enquired into. On that understanding Sharma broke his fast.

On February 13th he addressed a letter to the Home

Minister of the Government of Bombay, from which extracts, freely translated from the Hindustani original, read as follows:

"The police of to-day are the same as those in the days of the British and cannot be expected to change, but you, our leaders, who have to show your face to the world must not play into the hands of the police and destroy the country."

"The *Ramraj* of Gandhi cannot be achieved through police force, which is itself criminal by habit."

"These happenings will never escape the eyes of the masses. You Congress should not get into the habit of using the pretext of Gandhi's assassination to arrest your political opponents."

"To have a difference of opinion is the inherent right of man."

"I ask nothing of you, not even my release at your hands. I only ask you to look in the direction of Mahatma Gandhi and not to destroy this country of ours of which you too are a citizen."

These were the words of a man who, on the official letter-paper of the Congress, in a note signed by the Provincial President, had been certified as being "a prominent Congressman and a friend of ours". Nevertheless this "prominent Congressman" and friend of the people was kept in custody without a trial until May 7th. All of the grave charges against him fell through for he was unconditionally released. There was no inquiry whatsoever, and there was no trial of a man charged with having incited his followers to violence and of having distributed sweets to celebrate the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. But in the meanwhile, the municipal elections had come and gone. Sharma was out of the way.

This was the story of Lekhraj Sharma. It was the story of a man who was bewildered by the things that had happened to him under a government of his own people.

* * * * *

Several other stories came to light here and there in some of the newspapers of India. Sometimes they got tucked away into odd corners of the paper, because the policy of those papers was to support the Congress whom they had backed

throughout the long struggle against the British. It was naturally irksome for a Congress-minded newspaper to have to print news which reflected no credit on a government it had brought into existence. At the same time no journalist could ignore these stories because of their intrinsic news value.

One of the most important of these stories came from the United Provinces. There, an Indian by the name of Bharadwaj had been arrested. He was a Communist. The arrest took place on April 4th, 1948. At the time of his arrest Bharadwaj was semi-conscious, a bed-ridden consumptive who had been suffering from tuberculosis for six years and who, when arrested, was running a temperature of 104 degrees. He was reported to have been spitting blood at the time.

On April 8th—four days after his arrest—that Indian died within the walls of an Indian jail, under a people's government.

Of this incident, the *National Herald* of Lucknow, which is Pandit Nehru's own paper, said in an editorial comment: "Nothing the Prime Minister (of the United Provinces) has said can justify the government sending a man, even if he were a Communist, to his death."

Another United Provinces newspaper, *Hunkar*, published in the vernacular, was even more outspoken. It said: "Bharadwaj did not die. He was murdered. There can be no greater shame for a civilized government."

Public opinion had been roused by this incident and by the editorial comments thereon. As a result the U.P. Legislative Assembly passed a motion of adjournment on Bharadwaj's death, but the power to do the same thing all over again was still allowed to remain in the hands of the same administration which (to quote the *Hunkar*) had murdered a man.

* * * * *

In Malabar, South India, another Indian "died". His name was Moyarath Sankaran. On the day on which he was arrested Sankaran was known to have been taken to the jail hospital and injuries were reported to have been found on his body which had obviously been inflicted on him between the time of his arrest and the time he entered

hospital. The presumption was that these were police-inflicted injuries.

The next day Sankaran died. An Indian government—a people's government—did not hand over his body to his near relatives, as is the normal custom. The people's government hurriedly disposed of Sankaran's body. The people wondered why!

* * * * *

In my own province, Bombay, another détenu died in prison. His name was D. R. Kulkarni, and he was arrested under the same Securities Act on April 2nd. Kulkarni was no criminal. He was merely arrested for his political beliefs. Soon after his arrest he was taken to the Visapur jail in Ahmednagar district. Kulkarni had been suffering from asthma for a long time. A month in jail under the horrible jail conditions without a charge or a trial caused a stroke of paralysis and he became unconscious. He was then taken to the Ahmednagar government hospital.

The next day his wife sent a petition to the Home Minister of the government of Bombay, requesting the release of her husband who had been stricken by paralysis.

The Home Minister of a people's government did not acknowledge or reply to that petition.

Kulkarni regained consciousness after a few days but he lost his eyesight, and in his blind state, when no one was near him, he fell down from his cot in the jail hospital. That fall brought about a second attack of paralysis and he became unconscious once again, from which state he never recovered.

When he was in that condition—a paralytic, completely unconscious and completely blind—his wife petitioned the district court for his release. After the civil surgeon had endorsed the petition and certified that the facts stated by his wife were correct and that the détenu's condition was critical, the district magistrate agreed to release Kulkarni *for one month on parole,* but he specified certain conditions on which this temporary release would be granted.

Now the question arose how the conditions laid down by the district magistrate could be made binding on Kulkarni, who was then in an unconscious state. The police of a

people's government solved the dilemma by serving the release order on this political détenu, an unconscious man, and by taking the thumb impression of that unconscious man in order to make the conditions of the magistrate's order binding on him.

The treatment meted out to our political prisoners to-day has been no better than it was in the days of the much-complained-of British. On several occasions détenus have been known to go on hunger strikes because of the bad treatment they received.

At least the British had three classes of political prisoners: A, B and C. Our patriots whom the British detained were freely distributed in these three classes according to their status. But, true to its principles, the Congress régime has abolished class and almost all political prisoners now get the same "C" class treatment. The idea of giving the worst class of treatment to political prisoners is obviously motivated by the idea that opponents of the Congress should imbibe the spirit of humility whilst redeeming their political sins.

The motto of the Congress in office appeared to be nearing that of the Nazis: *Exterminate all those who do not agree with you.*

The Congress was never so intolerant. It is difficult to believe that those who now sought to dominate the mind and spirit of our free people were the same band of crusaders who rallied behind Mahatma Gandhi, pledged themselves to truth and pitted their spiritual strength against the weight of an empire. It is also difficult to believe that the once great non-violent army, which bared its chest to bullets and marched to its goal with the chant of freedom on its lips, could ever have bred the Congress provincial ministries which used their brute power to still the voice of a newly-freed people.

In 1942 Mahatma Gandhi said in his paper, the *Harijan*: "If we want to cultivate a true spirit of democracy, we cannot afford to be intolerant. Intolerance betrays want of faith in one's cause."

It was this want of faith in themselves, in their cause, and in their power, that made the Congress ministries in the provinces of India so intolerant of their political opponents.

Yet with all the power they wielded, with all the brute majority they could muster in the existing legislature, the days were gone when the Congress could represent the people without a single dissentient voice being raised against them. In the India of to-day, Congress is no longer looked upon as a friend of the people. Rather it is feared. In places it has degenerated into an almost feudal organization which is not ashamed of practising unabashed despotism. It had made a mockery of our freedom and, long after any semblance of emergency had passed, the home of an Indian could not be regarded as "his castle".

Once there was a time when a man who wore *khaddar* and a Gandhi cap was looked upon as a patriot. To-day that symbol of our liberty is being worn by plain-clothes policemen, masquerading as friends of the people.

The Indian revolted against this encroachment on his liberty, because Mahatma Gandhi had taught him to surrender his freedom to no one. In *Young India* could be found his inspiring words: "There will be no freedom for India so long as one man, no matter how highly placed he may be, holds in the hollow of his hand the life, property and honour of millions of human beings."

The Security Acts did place the life, property and honour of our people in the hands of the few who had shown themselves capable of using it for political advantage. To arrest and detain people without trial was contrary to the very spirit of the democracy for which we had fought, and the feeling grew in India that, notwithstanding the debt we owed to the Congress and its leaders, these same once-democratic leaders were now trying to make puppets out of free men.

The history of India in the months that followed August 1947 showed a marked similarity to the history of those people into whose lives fascism had crept. Fascism always seems to creep in unnoticed. It is only when it assumes tremendous proportions that a people become aware of its existence and then fascism becomes too big for a people to fight from within.

Adolf Hitler began by helping his people as our Congress had done. When the people had full faith in him and in the cause for which he was fighting—namely the liberation of

Germany from the imposition of the Versailles Treaty—he asked them for power to lead them to that freedom which had been denied to them by the victors of World War I.

The German people gave him that power.

He then asked them for power to deal with those who hindered him in the achievement of that freedom, a power which he could use without recourse to the normal courts of justice.

The people gave him these emergency powers.

He then asked for discretion to be left in his hands to decide when these emergency powers should be used, and to decide also when an emergency existed.

The German people gave him that discretion.

Gradually he so regimented his people and exercised such absolute power over their minds and bodies that they were committed to follow his sole judgement, no matter what he decreed or where he led them. Soon he reduced the German people to morons who goose-stepped at his command, and he reduced the German Press to an echo of his own voice, mere puppets who shouted, *Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Fuehrer.*

That was Nazism, and we in India condemned it. Many a Congress resolution can still be found in the archives of the Congress party in which fascism and dictatorship have been condemned in no uncertain words. But imperceptibly, and surely, the same ideas of power and government were creeping into the Congress administrations now dominating the Indian scene.

* * * * *

The fight for individual liberty gradually found champions in the high courts of India, whose judges began to speak out often in the most scathing terms against the gross abuse of these arbitrary powers acquired by Congress governments in the various provinces of a country pledged to democracy.

Out of the numerous utterances of these judges I have picked the most telling, which came from the West Bengal high court, Calcutta.

Inside the sombre precincts of the West Bengal high court, one of the younger school of barristers was arguing

very ably a *habeas corpus* application on behalf of a Communist member of the Bengal Legislative Assembly, Jyoti Basu, who had been arrested and detained without trial under the Security Acts.

There was, it appears, a slight loophole in the framing of that Act in the province of West Bengal. The West Bengal Public Security Act differed slightly from the Acts in some of the other provinces. In West Bengal, detention had to be *on reasonable grounds.* In Jyoti Basu's case, which was the first round of the big fight for the liberty of the individual, the counsel for the détenu pleaded that the reasonable nature of the grounds must be to the satisfaction not merely of the government but also of the court of law. Counsel therefore contended that the *habeas corpus* application could be heard by the high court and not be excluded from its jurisdiction.

The judges on this occasion held that the phrase "on reasonable grounds" might be interpreted to mean that reasonableness should be to the satisfaction of the provincial government and need not be to that of the court. Jyoti Basu's application was therefore turned down.

The matter, however, did not rest there. Though defeated in the first round, a more imposing array of young and progressive barristers turned up to fight the next round of *habeas corpus* applications which were pending. They all referred to cases under the Security Measures Act. The hearing of this bunch of applications came up before the Chief Justice and Mr. Justice Das. This time the judges declared that they disagreed with the earlier judgement in Jyoti Basu's case, and therefore referred the matter to a full bench of the high court which was to consist of five judges. The reference to a full bench indicated the serious nature of the issue involved.

The point referred to the full bench was the interpretation of the words "reasonable grounds". Was the government the sole judge of reasonableness or was it the courts of law? Could there be any redress from the arbitrary action of a government in matters relating to the liberty of the subject?

The hearing was marked by a series of important remarks made by the Chief Justice on this occasion.

The government had contended that the detention had been made in view of the state of emergency in the country. The defence counsels contended that what may be an emergency for the government-in-power need not be an emergency for the state.

The Chief Justice addressed the Advocate General: "There is no emergency in Bengal to-day compared with the emergency in Britain during the war."

The Advocate General, for the government, contended that a judge could not consider this question of whether there was an emergency or not.

Sharp came the Chief Justice's reply: "Why not? I am a human being and know whether there is an emergency or not."

The Advocate General: "No, my lord—you cannot as a judge do so."

The Chief Justice said that should such a contingency arise, he would elect to be a human being rather than a judge.

The Advocate General plodded on, and maintained that this question of reasonableness was for the government to decide, not the court.

"Why is it so?" the Chief Justice asked. "What is reasonable to a nitwit may not be so to others. Every government makes mistakes and I should say the West Bengal government is no exception."

The Chief Justice then pointed out the danger of such wide powers being left in the hands of a government. In answer to the Advocate General's claim that the government alone need be satisfied that the detention was on reasonable grounds, he said: "If that be so, then nobody could oppose the government at elections, as the government will put all its opponents into prison during the elections, detaining them without their getting any redress whatsoever."

When the government's charge-sheet against a journalist on the editorial board of *The People's Age* was handed up to the judges, the Chief Justice commented: "Well, if these are *reasonable grounds,* then I suppose you can arrest anyone at any time, anywhere in India."

Now the bulk of these cases on this particular occasion was of Communists. The Chief Justice read the charge-

sheets against the accused and remarked: "The Communists are quite strong in other countries. For instance, in France, they might any day constitute the government, but nowhere have measures been taken as in this country."

When the Counsel for the defence complained that even the notes he had taken whilst consulting his client in jail had been seized by the special branch police, the Chief Justice flared up and asked the Advocate General: "Has the government decided to deny even the ordinary legal facilities to Communist prisoners?"

The Advocate General said that the Counsel for the defence could get back the papers by applying to the Home Secretary. Standing on his full dignity, the young Counsel for the defence, feeling the power of the backing of the high court in which he was pleading, retorted: "I am not in the habit of visiting government offices and making requests to government officials. I want redress from this court." The Chief Justice agreed with him, and within half an hour a special branch official sheepishly came and returned the Counsel's notes.

All this took place in June 1948. The full bench was due to meet again on Monday, July 5th, to deliver judgement on these cases.

On Saturday night, July 3rd, 1948, the West Bengal ministry hurriedly issued a special ordinance, by which the words "reasonable grounds" were omitted from the clause empowering the government to detain persons without trial. The ordinance was, moreover, promulgated with *retrospective effect*! Thereby the court was no longer competent to judge the issue.

Provoked by this undemocratic encroachment on the powers of the judiciary, one of the judges, Mr. Justice Chatterjee, remarked: "Perhaps the eventuality of the full bench verdict going against the government is considered as an emergency situation!"

The government went further. A new section was added to the ordinance outlawing the harbouring of persons against whom detention warrants had been issued. The word "harbouring" was meant to include the giving of "shelter, food, drink, money, clothes, arms, ammunition or means of conveyance or assisting him by any means to evade appre-

hension." The penalty for "harbouring" was two years' rigorous imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 1,000.

The need for passing such an ordinance with such deterrent penalties spoke for itself.

Even the British had not fought their political opponents in this way.

The battle for freedom in India was not yet over. Only the front had changed. Instead of fighting the British by rallying behind the Congress, we found we now had to fight the Congress who had taken the place of the British.

* * * * *

In the third week of June 1948 one of my young assistants came rushing into the office.

"Boss," he said in his characteristic way, "there is a regular major operation going on at the high court. There's a little fellow whom the judges have released and the government want to arrest him again."

"How can a released man be re-arrested?" I asked.

"Oh, that's easy under the Security Acts," he replied. "They'll arrest him and find the charge later. But they're determined to get him, and he's leading them a fine dance in the process."

I asked what the delay was about and was told that a man could not be arrested on the premises of the high court.

He looked at me appealingly and said: "Can I cover this story?"

I said he could and he dashed out, taking one of our Press photographers with him.

Later that day this young reporter, whose experience in journalism was a mere three months, produced a story which was front-paged.

The story was about a 26-year-old aero-technician of Air India Ltd., Sholin Dey. He had figured prominently in fomenting a strike of Air India workers. He was vice-president of the Workers' Union and in December 1947 he had put forward a list of demands which included a higher wage for the employees. Nothing important happened until April 1948, when the Air Line bosses clearly saw a labour crisis ahead. The company then asked for government's inter-

vention to adjudicate in the matter and settle the dispute.

On April 7th the Political Secretary of the government of Bombay called a conference of the management and the workers. Sholin Dey went to this conference as the workers' representative. The conference lasted five hours and the two parties came to a tentative agreement.

When Dey left the conference it was about 8.30 in the evening. He walked towards Churchgate Station, where he was stopped by a man who flashed his identity card: SUB-INSPECTOR OF POLICE. Dey was asked to go along to the police station. There followed a detention of two months and eighteen days, during which Dey filed his *habeas corpus* application for a hearing or a discharge. The judges of the high court who heard his petition found no grounds for keeping him behind bars. His release was therefore ordered.

This verdict must have been anticipated by the government, for they had made arrangements to re-arrest him as he came out of court a free man. Sholin Dey had meanwhile been informed by his friends of the trick which was being played upon him and, being aware that no one could be arrested on the high court's premises, he was determined to enjoy such little freedom as was possible until the high court closed for the day.

The Bombay high court was, therefore, the scene of a game of hide and seek on that Friday afternoon. To the casual observer, it appeared as if some dangerous gang of bandits had entered the precincts of that august court and that our brave and powerful police force, defenders of the people, were on their trail. Policemen in their royal blue plus-fours and their yellow caps cordoned the court. Plain-clothes men of the Criminal Investigation Department, totalling twenty-one in number and wearing Gandhi caps, had been stationed at various strategic positions of ambush in case of escape.

Dey used his two and a half hours of freedom to meet his host of friends and co-workers and to talk to his mother. She had come that day to take him home. Finally, Dey walked out and allowed the police to arrest him.

"While the sight of these frolics in the high court offered

an amusing spectacle to onlookers, it was not without its sad undertone," the young reporter said. "For Sholin Dey's mother, who had come to take her son back home, had to return without him."

It was just a human story, but it showed what a mockery was being made of civil liberty!

VIII

THE SWORD IS MIGHTIER

An integral part of these Security Acts was the section which dealt with the Press. This section was not in the original powers acquired by the government. While the government wanted arbitrary powers to control individuals who were *goondas*, ruffians, communal fanatics and other anti-social elements, it was at first felt that it could not possibly want such powers against the national Press, which had been the armoured spearhead in our fight for liberation. But quite soon the various fanatically-communal organizations started to put out mushroom papers of their own which were nothing but propaganda sheets advocating the continuance and the intensification of the bitter communal war which was being waged in the country.

The standard, traditional Press of India agreed with the government that some quick measure should be adopted to curb the damage being done by these new, scurrilous newspapers. The government at the same time gave the assurance that the powers they were assuming, which violated the principle of the liberty of the Press, were only to be in existence for the period of "the emergency", and would only be used to check the communal war. They would not be used for political purposes.

Under these powers, if a provincial government were satisfied that such action was necessary for the purpose of preventing activity prejudicial to

> the public safety,
> the maintenance of public order, or
> the tranquillity of the province, or
> any part thereof,

the government could take one of several courses open to it.

These included the suppression of a paper, temporarily or absolutely; the demanding of a security; insistence on pre-censorship, and other steps of a similar nature. The powers were admittedly similar to those acquired by other

democratic governments in times of great national emergencies, but it was the recognized unwritten rule that whereas detrimental facts could be suppressed, newspapers were never to be forced to write as ordered, against their own convictions.

But such a clause was included in the Bombay Security Measures Act. The government could, by an order in writing addressed to a printer, publisher or editor, compel that individual to print or publish, as if over his own signature, what the government wished him to say on any matter once it had been broached by that newspaper. In other words, the government could insist on its own version of an incident being printed however incorrect that version might be. The government would dictate to an editor the words of the contradiction. Once an editor touched upon a subject or an incident, the government could step in and deprive him of the right to present that subject as he thought fit.

This was the position under the Security Measures Act. It was no mean power. It had never been known to exist in peace-time in any free and democratic country in the world. The "emergency" in India had apparently necessitated it.

I was working late in my office on the evening of June 29th, 1948. I had just signed the last page-proof for the next morning's issue. The paper had virtually gone to bed.

There was a knock at our swing doors and through the open gap below I could see the boots of a police officer. It was the first time a policeman had set foot in our office. He checked my identity and served an order on me. It was an order of the government of Bombay under the all-powerful Public Security Measures Act, invoked in the name of the security of the state.

The order served on me was for no political comment in my paper. It referred to a news-item which was as follows:

"Mr. ——, Minister for ——, paid a visit to a famous pathologist last week. The Hon'ble Minister had brought along a friend, —— —— ——, for free medical examination. The two of them went off to sleep in the doctor's air-conditioned room, to the amusement of everyone else.

"Below, a car waited at the entrance of the building at Phirozeshah Mehta Road. From the radiator the pennant of

the Minister flew. The Minister's unshaven driver smoked a *bidi* (cigarette) while his toes rested on the dashboard. A policeman coming from behind informed the driver of the NO PARKING sign and that he was causing obstruction to the free flow of traffic. The driver, still reclining, gave a laconic reply between puffs of *bidi* smoke. He said *'Yeh Minister —— ki motor hai.'*[1] The policeman, crestfallen, went away.

"Meanwhile, for an hour and a half the traffic continued to be obstructed and the traffic rules broken.

"While Mr. —— was sleeping in the air-conditioned room, several visitors at the Secretariat were politely informed that the Minister was attending an important conference, and that they would have to wait.[2]"

For this we were ORDERED to publish a contradiction drafted by the government and further ORDERED to apologize to the Minister concerned, and if we refused we faced the possibility of having our paper suspended and the press shut down.

Comment, though tempting, seems superfluous.

The matter went to the high court on a petition from me, but so wide were the powers under the Security Act that, at the suggestion of the presiding judge, I accepted the suggested compromise, for my petition seemed likely to be thrown out on technical grounds. Discretion seemed the better part of valour. Each party had to bear its own costs.

Expense was the sole object of many of these actions into which newspapers critical of the government were pushed by having to defend themselves in criminal and civil actions, sometimes of a footling nature, but very often involving moral turpitude. The idea of the government was to harass its critics, to make them waste hours in the courts at the end of which the case would be postponed to another day. All these postponements were costly. Each time counsel had to be paid for his appearance. Sometimes, when the case came near to hearing, the charges were dropped and government withdrew its prosecution, for the punishment of the erring editor had already been achieved.

Many a small paper has been squeezed out of existence in this way. Many a paper has been called upon to furnish

[1] "This is Minister ——'s car."
[2] *March,* June 2nd, 1948.

large securities, which it could not afford. Many a paper has had members of its staff arrested and detained without trial, with a view to reducing its editorial strength. The Congress in power waged a cold war on the critical Press, seeking to silence the voice of those who were unafraid of speaking the truth.

Some of the bigger newspaper combines had recently changed hands and had become the organs of wealthy capitalist individuals and groups. All these press-lords stood to benefit and thrive under a reactionary régime in India. The result was that the presentation of news in many of these papers became somewhat distorted. Many papers would not go the whole hog and actually give misleading news, but it was very simple for them to suppress the vital facts which showed up the "impurities" in the new administration. Likewise, it was in the interest of these newspapers, their proprietors and their patrons to play down the discontent of the people, the grievances of the common man and his betrayal at the hands of the Congress.

The bigger newspapers, therefore, became the voice of a crude section of Indian vested interests, whose professed nationalism was only a means to profit, rather than the voice of the people.

These newspapers defended their policy of treating the news so unfairly by saying that it was their duty to rally around the first free government of India and to uphold it at any cost. "Give them a chance" was the theme song of many an editorial on those few occasions on which these newspapers were compelled to admit that the administration was floundering. They would not, however, go so far as to admit that the administration had in many places become corrupt. Occasionally they would moralize in a general sort of way on the need for a higher code of morals for government servants, officials and administrators, but they still maintained that the Congress alone, with all its faults, knew what was best for the people.

The government in return subsidized this Press by the heavy advertising which it handed out as a reward for loyalty. The discontent of the people had little chance to find expression in a Press which was now so closely associated with big business. Journalism in India, which was

once part of the crusade for freedom, had now become a tool in the hands of the new oppressors.

Only a few odd newspapers remained which were willing to sacrifice the lure of big profits and even face bludgeoning at the hands of the government in order to keep up that once great tradition of the Indian Press.

For over a quarter of a century our national Press had fought every attempt of the British to curb the liberty of our people, the right to stand up and fight for free speech, the right to freedom of expression, the right of public meeting. These fundamental principles of democracy which burned in every Indian heart had always found champions in the Indian Press. That was its tradition. To-day, when in broad daylight the Congress governments of the Centre and the Provinces are attempting to revive in this country conditions which existed only in the worst days of the British rule, the same Indian national Press is acquiescing in the process of steady oppression which characterizes this new Congress rule. The old fighters for freedom, who once wrote their editorials as if in their blood, were now smug and complacent. The Press was no longer willing to fight for the rights of the people. It condoned the encroachments of the government on our basic rights.

In that same year, 1948, we had sent two representatives to the Press convention of the United Nations at Geneva. There, in sight of the world Press, our accredited representatives pledged themselves to uphold freedom of information, and contracted with the other free peoples of the world to secure to all our own nationals and to every contracting state the freedom to impart or receive information and opinions without governmental interference and without any discrimination. They further agreed to the principle of giving freedom to transmit and listen to information and opinions within our territories, across our frontiers.

While these pledges seem impressive in cold print it is common knowledge to the average man in India that they have been nothing more than scraps of paper to the governments at home. Slowly but steadily our Press has been regimented to become the voice and organ of the government, letting the people hear only the official version of the picture.

The danger is that, tired of fighting, the people will become timid and helpless. They will in time become mere puppets.

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At the end of a heated three-day debate of the All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference, the following resolution was passed unanimously:

"This Conference is firmly of the opinion that there is no justification for the continuance of public safety legislation of the type in force in several provinces in so far as it affects the Press. Such legislation militates against free expression of public opinion and is not only open to abuse but has actually been abused by the executive authority in some provinces.

"In expressing this opinion the Conference recognizes the need for the executive to be armed with special powers under conditions of national emergency and, while calling upon the Press of India to function with a due sense of responsibility in stabilizing India's newly-won freedom, the Conference DEMANDS that legislation conferring such wide powers should be revised, particularly in the direction of providing suitable safeguards including, ABOVE ALL, judicial review of executive action.

"This Conference further DEMANDS that all action hitherto taken under the emergency measures should be reviewed in consultation with the representatives of the Press."

This was in July 1948, and Mahatma Gandhi's son, Devdas, editor of the *Hindustani Times,* presided over the conference.

Devdas Gandhi had the name but not the mind of his father. He was very unhappy about the resolution and made his discomfiture felt at the conference itself.

He was more a party-editor than a pure journalist. It was too much to expect him to go against his party's government in order to champion the rights of the Press.

The result was that the government were able to ignore the unanimous decision of the Indian editors and our chief

spokesman was satisfied with the government's explanation. The President of the Congress, Dr. Sitaramayya, said in a public speech: "The Press must become a unit of the government."

By January 1949, Devdas was even beginning to take sides with the government against what he called the "yellow Press". To the journalists of Madras he said: "The yellow Press should be given no quarter whatsoever if the profession of journalism is to prosper in the country and healthy traditions set up. I am for refusing admission to such people to organizations like the All-India Editors' Conference."

The so-called "yellow Press" to which he referred was only the Press which had criticized the Congress. It was far from "yellow" in more senses than one. But whether it was "yellow" or not, it hardly lay in the mouth of a journalist president of the newspaper editors of India to say that he wanted this section of the Press excluded from a body which represented the whole Press of India. Devdas Gandhi went further. He said: "As president of the Newspaper Editors' Conference I will not give any protection against any government action or proceedings against such papers or periodicals. In my official capacity and as a member of various Press advisory committees, I shall always press for action against papers of this kind whenever I am consulted about it."

It was as if the editors of the London *Times* or the *New York Times,* as president of the British or the American Editors' Association, were to advocate the exclusion of the *Daily Mail,* the *Daily Express* and the *News of the World* from the British association, or of the *Daily News* and the tabloids from its American counterpart.

An even more ludicrous suggestion was to come from the editor of *Lokamanya,* Mr. P. V. Gadgil, in a speech he made at Sangli to the Marathi journalists assembled in conference.

"It is my firm conviction," this Indian editor said, "that newspaper work should be removed from the hands of private capital AND BROUGHT UNDER PUBLIC OWNERSHIP."

That meant state control of the Press. And here was an

Indian editor advocating that the Press should become a ventriloquist's dummy as in a fascist state.

It therefore became increasingly difficult to fight for the freedom of the Press when our own men were lining up on the other side.

Often I sat at my desk in that little cubicle of ours late in the evening when all around was quiet and the issue of the paper just gone to press, and wondered whether a fight against such heavy odds was worth while. In the India of to-day the sword is mightier than the pen. It appeared so much easier to toe the official line, applaud the men in power and bury the sorrows of our people. But on more than one occasion like this an odd word of encouragement and hope from some little reader in an obscure corner of India had urged me on.

I remember a post-card from an elderly man. Each week he received his copy of my paper. He read it from cover to cover. Then in the evening the people of the village would gather around him in his garden and he would translate to them extracts from what I had written. "You see," he wrote, "your message spreads."

IX

TRADING IN PATRIOTISM

CARTOONIST SHANKAR, WHO PLAYS the role of a David Low in India, drew a little cartoon in his *Weekly*, showing a typical opportunist couple in conversation with Pandit Nehru. With a sheepish grin on his face, the man was saying to Pandit Nehru: "Well, Panditji, if you can't spare an ambassadorship, maybe you can give us some extra petrol coupons."

I shall pass over the Ambassadorships; for an even brisker trade in patriotism was being carried on in the home market, where Congressmen were using their positions for personal aggrandizement. It was often difficult to produce the necessary evidence to bring these erring patriots to book. In many cases the money changed hands in notes of small denominations of which there can be no record. The anti-corruption branch of the police, which alone was in a position to track down the many shady transactions, realized that it would be more politic not to follow up clues which would lead to the exposure of corruption among high-ranking Congressmen and officials.

The police in India were already known to be easily accessible to graft. It was their long-established record that almost anything that was illegal could be done with their connivance and, therefore, with perfect safety, so long as it was made worth their while. If a house of ill-fame did not wish to be raided or an illegal bookmaker did not wish to be embarrassed on the racecourse, he paid the usual "tariff" for these services un-rendered. The British used to overlook these minor levies, it being to their advantage not to be too strict with the police force which was so useful to them in maintaining their grip over the country.

But in free India, while the government brought to task many an insignificant individual in the police force for having taken a small *bakshish* of eight annas or a rupee, they shut their eyes to the occasions on which many a rich man seemed to have been caught red-handed. Somehow the

larger profiteers always managed to get a verdict of Not Guilty recorded in their favour or have the charges against them withdrawn for want of the necessary legal quantum of evidence. At the same time it could be seen from newspaper reports that when our vigilant anti-corruption branch laid hands on a baker for selling a loaf of bread without a coupon, or on a small grain dealer who had obliged one of his old customers with an extra bowl of rice, the unfortunate fellow had had it.

Only in one instance in Calcutta, in April 1949, did a humane magistrate revolt against the persecution of the poor, and even though the accused pleaded guilty on a charge of contravening the rationing regulation the magistrate imposed only a token fine of one anna.

The case was that of a poor villager who had violated the regulation by bringing rice into the city of Calcutta, a rationed area. The magistrate, when convicting the accused, said: "The more I try such cases the more I feel that I am sentencing a class of poor people who are rendering a distinct service to the citizens at their very door."

This judgement could not have gone down very well with the government concerned but it was just an isolated exception. For the most part the petty transgressor suffered at the hands of the law, while the big black-marketeers had so organized themselves that they had carefully installed their associates in some of the anti-corruption organizations, with the result that, instead of these organizations bringing black-marketeers to book, they made their detection even more difficult.

This further deterioration in the integrity of the police force which took place after the Congress took over from the British was directly traceable to the Congress-controlled organizations which were harbouring these black-marketeers and allowing them to move about freely in governmental and social circles. Ministers often went to perform the opening ceremonies of business concerns belonging to gentlemen whose records were very shady. It was, in the circumstances, very difficult for the small fry of the police force, even if they were honest, to attempt to combat such high-level corruption which had the blessing and protection of the men in power.

Moreover, the smaller magistrates were so badly paid that in order to maintain a reasonable standard of living, they found they had to supplement their meagre salaries with such *bakshish* as came their way. If a magistrate were too strict and too unreasonable in a case in which a rich man was involved, he sometimes found himself shunted off to some other court where he would be out of harm's way. Alternatively, if he took a broad view he stood to gain financially and materially, and if the accused were a man of power and influence the magistrate stood to gain quick promotion. The choice before an underpaid magistrate was, therefore, an obvious one. If he did not take advantage of the situation in which he found himself to better his position he had only himself to blame.

Facts, however, spoke for themselves, and it was inexplicable to the people how many of these Congressmen in power, whose sources of income prior to the attainment of freedom were so small, could now be seen about living at a far higher standard of life than could ever have been possible under normal circumstances.

In the old days a Congress worker or a minor party official would be seen going about in a bus or a tram or, if he were more fortunate, in a rattling old Morris or a Wolseley. Now these same men could be seen driving in grand new Buicks, Packards, Cadillacs and other American cars of the most expensive range. Patriotically they boycotted British cars!

It may be said that these men who took the place of the governing British had automatically a bigger and better-paid position than they had before, but the question still remained unanswered where the money came from which paid for these expensive automobiles. The cars in question were not government cars, nor could they have been paid for out of salaries, however high. They were in many cases paid for in hard cash, in Rs. 100 notes, brought to the car dealers in a bag. The mode of payment itself indicated that these individuals were reluctant to bank their monies for fear of being called upon to disclose the source of these large amounts of cash or to explain how they came by them.

In many cases, certain highly placed Congressmen made

quite a tidy sum of money merely by purchasing these hard-to-get new cars at the controlled price and reselling them after a short interval as secondhand cars at one and a half times or double the price, for there was no control whatsoever on the price of secondhand cars. An influential Congressman could obtain a new car at the controlled price at any time and several worthy party members have been known, in the last year or two, to have changed cars as many as five times in a year. No one could take any action, because the transactions were outwardly legal even though they were morally shady.

There were hundreds of other ways, known the world over, in which profiteering could be done and these patriots made use of them all. When food grains and cloth were controlled, Congressmen and Congress sympathizers were known to have hoarded both these commodities even in their very homes. Bales of cloth have been found stacked in private godowns by men who were not recognized dealers in cloth. Likewise, bags of rice were known to have been stored in the homes of the selfsame men who were publicly moaning about the plight of "our hungry people".

With such an example set by those belonging to the party which had engineered our freedom, it became very difficult for the little man to set for himself a high standard of life or to think in terms of sacrifice. All the moral values on which his struggle for freedom were based were now being upset. He had followed the Congress all through the years and it was difficult to know where and when he should stop following its example.

The result was that, after the British had quit, the whole standard of morality of India steadily deteriorated. Circumstances forced the little man to adapt himself to the complete absence of any moral values around him. Soon the people themselves became corrupt, fighting, as they were, a grim battle for survival, with prices of essential commodities soaring higher every day. They had either to take what profit they could in whatever manner they could and use their illegal gains to combat the inflation or they had gradually to go under in an effort to remain honest.

Those who were hardest hit were the men of character who had fixed incomes and belonged to the middle class. In

two years of freedom these men who were the educated backbone of the country were to be seen in shabby and frayed clothes, their incomes shrinking day by day, desperately trying to cling to the decent standard of middle class life to which they were accustomed, struggling to educate their children and too honest to descend to the shabby methods used by the traders in patriotism.

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Congress House is the official headquarters of the Congress party in every province. There is one in Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi and in every major city in India. To the people who had received direction in the past in their struggle for freedom, Congress House was symbolic of the principles of Mahatma Gandhi. It was a place revered and respected by every nationalist. It was, above all, pledged to non-violence, which was the basis of every movement which the Mahatma had launched.

Imagine the surprise with which we turned over the pages of a vernacular paper, the *Maha Gujerat,* edited by a Congressman who had the courage to expose the Congress from within.

The *Maha Gujerat* said: "Everyone knows that Congress House, Vithalbhai Patel Road, Girgaum, Bombay, is the address of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, but the government file at New Delhi shows this address as being that of the New India Arms and Ammunition Stores. Is this the office of the Congress Committee, or is it a mercantile house?"

The editor of the paper was, at the time of his writing, a member of that same Congress Executive Committee. He obviously knew what he was talking about. The facts were that some of the office-bearers of the Congress party had formed a company to trade in arms and ammunition and had given the address of Congress House as being that of their company. Congress House had virtually become an ammunition dump.

When I front-paged this news item it reached a wider public and people all over the country were shocked to read it. There was not a line of contradiction. Instead, a few weeks later there was a change of address recorded in

the Defence department files. The arms and ammunition had been hurriedly moved to a haberdashery store.

The question which still remained unanswered was: "Why were leading Congressmen trading in arms and ammunition?"

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Up to the last days of his life the Mahatma had edited his famous paper, the *Harijan*. After his death its editorship passed on to his ardent follower and faithful disciple, Mr. K. G. Mashruwala, an elderly man steeped in Gandhian philosophy, a man utterly above the gains and advantages of party politics, a pure, unadulterated Gandhi-ite.

Front-paged in *Harijan* of October 3rd, 1948, there appeared a signed article by the new editor. In this article Mashruwala warned Congressmen against cashing in on their past sacrifices. He deplored the Congress party's attitude of giving special treatment in various matters to party men merely because they had taken part in the political movement. Mashruwala spoke of certain special facilities proposed to be granted to students who had taken part in various Congress movements against the British government in order to obtain admission for these students into educational institutions where accommodation was limited.

In other words, political service was to be a short cut to scholarship.

Mashruwala said that he had also heard from a correspondent in Madras who had drawn his attention to a scheme published by the Madras government for rewarding political sufferers with allotments of land. "If this report is true, it seems to be a doubtful method of consolidating one's party through the power which a governing party necessarily possesses in the State. It sets a bad example for other parties to follow when any of them come into power. In a democratic form of government this might happen at any time."

Mashruwala referred to the executive and criminal action which was being taken by the present Congress government against the followers of other political parties. "It is not impossible," he said, "that in the course of time the very heat of coercion might enable some of these parties to grow strong enough to overthrow the Congress party. Such a new

party in power will follow the example of Congress party by rewarding all those who might have suffered under the Congress régime, and in this way the country will always have the kind of government which thrives on nepotism in the wide sense of that term. By rewarding those who suffered out of patriotic sentiment we are transferring them from the list of patriots to that of mercenaries or farsighted businessmen."

These words came from the editor of the *Harijan*, Mahatma Gandhi's own paper—the paper which had guided our people through the toughest days of our struggle. For the *Harijan* to warn the Congress, in the indignant language which its editor had used, against coercion, nepotism and political jingoism showed how glaring was the moral deterioration of the foremost political party in India. The *Harijan* spoke with unimpeachable authority on Congress affairs.

Another warning came from Sarat Chandra Bose, a former leader of the Congress party in the Central Legislative Assembly, an eminent lawyer, the undisputed political leader of Bengal. Sarat Bose made a speech in Bombay in July 1948, at a gathering of the Progressive Group, which shook the smug complacency of many a local Congressman. He said: "After ten months of existence, India has produced a maimed and crippled baby without much sign of life. She has been regulated and regimented to such a state that she is unable to throw up her arms and kick her legs. Our recent past has been one of which we cannot be proud. WE HAVE COPIED IN EVERY DETAIL THE EXAMPLE OF THE BRITISH.

"The repressive ordinances, acts and regulations of the British have all been made into law to-day; even an ordinance of 1818 has found a place in our draft constitution. What is most shameful is that these repressive measures are far more stringent than the British ever dared to take. . . . You cannot make up for your inefficiency of administration by enacting public security measures. . . . Free speech, association and assemblies are things of the past. Our newspapermen are representatives only of a servile press; the same men who once had the guts to criticize the British régime in their newspapers are to-day looking to New Delhi

for orders. . . . Our home policy is calculated to deprive the subjects of their liberty. . . . We have developed cold feet. . . ."

Sarat Bose felt that the Congress had betrayed the people. In plain words he said: "Corruption, nepotism and graft are on the increase in every province. Pandit Nehru had once said that all black-marketeers should be hanged from the nearest tree and that the public services should be manned by patriots and not by Indian Civil Servants, as these were misfits, and until we shoved them out we could not make any progress at all. ALL THESE UTTERANCES AND PROMISES MADE IN THE LAST TWENTY YEARS REMAIN MERELY UTTERANCES AND PROMISES WHICH AWAIT REDEMPTION. . . . How can an Indian look up to the Congress any longer to fulfil those promises?"

One more warning came from Pandit Radhakant Malaviya, a Member of the Constituent Assembly, and a son of the late Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, a veteran stalwart of the Congress. In a speech he made to the same Progressive Group in Bombay in October 1948, the younger Malaviya delivered a vigorous and sustained attack against the policy of the Congress governments who were, he said, tolerating all kinds of corruption. He quoted Lord Acton's dictum: "All power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." He said that we were worse off to-day in every way than during the British rule. He pointed out that the country's wealth was concentrated among the few capitalists, while 320,000,000 people lived at the bare subsistence level. He referred to tax evasion by the rich and asked if and when the government proposed taking some action. He said: "To add insult to injury, those who evade taxes are the very ones who are fêted as patriots and honoured." He uttered the solemn warning that, unless matters were put right in India soon, the country was likely to go the way of Chiang Kai-Shek's China.

"The honour of India is at stake," Malaviya said. "The good name of our country is involved. The interests of millions of Indians demand that those at the top must be honest and free from reproach."

The average Indian then began to feel that there must be

something very wrong with the Indian National Congress as it is to-day. The promises made by the Congress when it was a revolutionary force in opposition were forgotten once its leaders were safe in the saddle. Intoxicated by power, individual Congressmen assumed arrogant airs. History has proved on more than one occasion that such an attitude on the part of a political party in power invariably leads to the establishment of a fascist state, followed by anarchy and confusion.

In January 1949 came the confession of guilt from the Congress itself. Its president, Dr. Sitaramayya, issued a directive for the guidance of Congressmen. The need for such a directive was evidence enough of the rot that had set in.

The directive said:

"No Congressman—more especially the members of the elective bodies—should interest himself in recommending candidates for offices, for securing permits for export or import or for obtaining licences for shops, for themselves and their friends and none should approach the authorities —particularly the Executive, including judicial and police— in respect of civil or criminal matters pending before them.

"It has come to the knowledge of Congress Committees that not seldom is a place on transportation committees, cloth licensing boards and allied bodies abused so as to secure privileges and profits for the members or their friends. This must be scrupulously avoided as otherwise the only alternative would be to ask the Congressmen not to serve on such Committees.

"There are universal complaints about bribery and black-marketing. Wherever possible, Congressmen should put forth earnest efforts to bring the culprits to book. But their endeavours in this direction would be successful only in the measure in which their own conduct is above board. Often-times you come across the very persons who have complained about the prevalence of the two vices, falling victims to temptations themselves either in connexion with bribery or with purchase of articles in black-market from a fountain-pen to a motor car.

"Everyone knows that these things are wrong, but under the stress of temptation, he succumbs.

"It is therefore necessary for the police to be alert, so that a pious resolve once made may operate as a deterrent against deviation from the straight path.

"An organized attempt is necessary to check the growing tendency to profit by the influence that the Congressmen undoubtedly can exercise over officers and ministers. It is earnestly pleaded that Ministers themselves and their Secretariat should set their faces against such inroads on their own authority and jurisdiction and whenever transgression of healthy rules of non-interference occurs, they may be good enough to direct the attention of the Provincial Congress Committees to such lapses.

"It is widely noticed that with the formation of Ministries, the unity of the Congress organization and its harmony have been disturbed, and those who have been left out of Ministerships have formed themselves into opposite groups in the organization. This is reflected in the working of the legislative party itself.

"Responsible government abroad is based on long-standing traditions which have trained the party in power to respect the opposition, and vice versa."

This directive of the Congress President was bold and statesmanlike; in actual effect, it could produce no results. The situation had gone beyond control or repair.

The men who were wallowing in corruption could hardly be expected to change their moral standards because of a directive from their president.

It was in no case a party affair. It was for the government to smash up the rackets and expose the men, however high, who were corrupt.

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As far back as 1936, Pandit Nehru made a speech at the Congress session in Lucknow. Of the British administration, he said:

"I have watched this process of moral and intellectual decay and realized even more than I did previously how autocratic power corrupts, degrades and vulgarizes.

"All criticism hurts the sensitive skin of the government and its reactions are quick and far-reaching.

"The more incompetent it grows, the less it likes being told so.

"There is the tremendous deprivation of civil liberties in India . . . a government that has ceased to have even a shadow of justification for its existence."

Twelve years later, the same Jawaharlal Nehru was to hear his own words quoted back to him. But it did not worry him or his government, for they were now in power.

In the early 1930s, in the House of Commons, Sir Samuel Hoare, then Secretary of State for India, dismissed adverse Indian opinion on his administration with the words: "Let dogs bark; the caravan moves on."

To-day, under a people's government, we are still just barking dogs.

X

FADS AND FETISHES

"INDIANIZATION" HAD BEEN THE cry of the people during the days of the British. The Indians rightly wished that the first chance should be given to their own people in all the services, civil, military and administrative.

Closely allied to this idea of indianization was the idea of *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* meant that which was home-made and the people were asked to live and think in terms of *swadeshi*, even though the indigenous product was often inferior to its imported equivalent.

Swadeshi was a political and economic weapon which Gandhi taught us to use. In the case of cloth, its political effect was to deal a blow to Britain by crippling the Lancashire mill industry. Economically it created an income, however small, for the people of the Indian villages who used up the idle hours of the rainy season by spinning *khaddar*.

There was a desire expressed by many of our national leaders, including Gandhi himself, that with freedom we should not only wear *khaddar* but live and think in terms of *swadeshi*. We should in fact indianize our whole approach to life and it followed that we should speak Indian as much as possible.

While in theory the latter idea was most laudable, it became ridiculous when it tried to overreach itself. The impact of the British over so long a period had left its mark on many aspects of our life and culture, which it was impossible to eradicate overnight. English had out of necessity become the official language in India, bridging the difference between various linguistic areas. There were also no Sanskrit or Indian words for such things as the telephone, railway station, and many other inventions which had come to India in the last hundred years. Some faddists of the Congress breed decided that it would be a sign of defeat if one had to continue to use these English words in our daily speech. They felt that it would be to our everlasting shame if in

Free India we had no Indian word for the telephone. To meet this difficulty a handful of more academically-minded gentlemen sat down, dug into Sanskrit literature and produced the word *dhwani-vayaka-yantra.* "Dhwani" means "voice"; "vayaka" means "that which carries"; "yantra" means "machine". All that put together therefore became the Indian word for telephone.

Dhwani-vayaka-yantra satisfied our desire for indianization but it made everyday life much too difficult, for each time you wanted to take a girl out you would have to give her a *dhwani-vayaka-yantra* call!

I suppose no pants could be worn by anyone who thought nationally, for the correct attire was either a *dhoti* (six yards of cheese cloth twirled around one's lower torso and legs) or tight *chunidars* (sort of tight, reeved-up jodhpurs), or, for more informal attire, just ordinary night pyjamas, either plain or striped, complete with cord. For the few Indians who had got into the habit of wearing trousers and who did not have a single national garment to their name, some delay had to be expected before supplies of the national dress could be procured. In the meantime they would be in a very peculiar position when, requiring the replacement of a button, they found that there was no word in the Sanskrit language to cope with such an eventuality, for the button was a foreign article with a foreign name, and could not be recomposed in Sanskrit, unless of course we could call it by the Sanskrit equivalent of *trouser-holding-together-machine.*

The next difficulty was to determine our national language. Throughout the length and breadth of India we have a tremendous variety of vernacular languages, and for generations have depended upon English or pidgin-English to tide us over from one linguistic area to another. In 1925 the Congress passed its celebrated resolution in which Hindustani was accepted as the national language. Hindustani served as a vinculum, bracketing Hindi and Urdu. But a resolution alone could not make a language understood all over the country. It will take many years before the uneducated Bengal farmer can converse with his fellow countryman of the south.

To add to all the confusion there is even a controversy,

still unended, regarding the legal paraphrase for Hindustani. Should it be called the common language, the national language, the state language, or the federal language? Or should it be called the *sab-ki-boli* (language of all) or the *rashtrabhasha* (the language of the country.) While all these suggestions have been put forward in India and long articles have appeared in the columns of the Press, a button still remains a button in India.

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In the old days, at the end of every cinema show or of any public performance at which music was played, we heard the strains of "God Save The King". In August 1947 that was definitely out. We then went into a flat spin about what we should play instead.

For quite a long time two songs had vied with each other for pride of place as the Indian national song. One was the *Vande Mataram* ("Long Live The Motherland"), composed by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee; the other was Tagore's great song *Jana Gana Mana*.

The first named was the older of the two songs. It was not specifically written as a hymn to Mother India, even though the name suggests it. Chatterjee was a Bengali novelist and not a song writer. The song occurs in one of his novels which deals with a group of Brahmins who revolt against alien rule in Bengal. According to the story, they turned marauders in the true Robin Hood tradition and followed an esoteric cult. *Vande Mataram* was the song they sang in their mountain hide-outs, in praise of the goddess they worshipped. The song can be interpreted as a tribute to India, personified and invoked as a goddess. As idol worship was contrary to the Moslem religion, the Moslems objected to *Vande Mataram*. During the first Congress Ministries (1937-39), there were many stormy debates and angry walk-outs staged in the provincial assemblies over the issue of the singing of this song. The Moslem League, in its charges of repression and atrocities committed by the Congress on the Moslems in India, officially enumerated the singing of the *Vande Mataram* as one of them. The Congress thereafter decided to adopt only a truncated form of *Vande Mataram* as the national song.

It was, however, never regarded as satisfactory as an anthem. Its words and music were too plaintive. It could not easily be played by a military band. It had no chorus and was unsuitable for mass singing. It struck no note of triumph or of victory, so necessary in a song which was to be the anthem of a rising nation.

Consequently the government of India looked for an alternative and, although the national anthem of India is not yet officially fixed, a provisional anthem is Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana.*

This song, addressed to "the arbiter of India's destiny", has had a somewhat chequered career. The fiery nationalists of Bengal frowned upon it soon after it was written. A whispering campaign was started, which alleged that Tagore had written it on the occasion of the Delhi Durbar of 1911 and that the "arbiter of India's destiny" was King George V.

There is no doubt that Tagore's is the more rousing song, but in true nationalist fashion the south Indian raised an objection to it because the poet had listed in the song the provinces of India in such a way that Madras was not included in it as a unit. And, said the man from Assam, how can I stand to a national anthem in which my province is not even mentioned? On July 1st, 1948, when a radio station was inaugurated at Shillong in Assam, a group of artists picketed the studio as a protest against the singing of *Jana Gana Mana.* Moreover, geographical anomalies had now arisen as a result of the partition, for half of Bengal and half of the Punjab own allegiance to someone other than "the arbiter of India's destiny".

It seems pointless to be so determined to have a national anthem and to quibble over its selection before we have imbibed the national spirit.

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The desire to have Indianization in form rather than in spirit became more conspicuous during the early months of freedom, when ostensibly patriotic gentlemen drafted numerous resolutions all over the country urging the change of all names of roads which had anything whatever to do with the British. No one could say anything against the renaming of Esplanade Road as Mahatma Gandhi Road.

But very soon the situation became somewhat ridiculous when city fathers wanted to re-name almost every road with an Indian name.

There was a move to change the name of New Delhi to Motinagar, after Pandit Nehru's father, Motilal. Likewise there were some people who did not like the main roads of Delhi to carry the names of the great Moghul Emperors, Akbar and Aurangzeb. Petty-minded Hindu communalists tried to obscure the memory of the many hundred years of Moghul domination and Moghul civilization over India, merely because they were piqued that the partition and the creation of the separate state of Pakistan had denied them the opportunity of controlling, for the first time, the geographical unit which was formerly known as India. The attempt to de-Moghulize the old Moghul capital only showed that the Hindu, in spite of all his recent political achievements, had not the confidence of a free man and was wanting to insist that his new domination should be placarded on the streets of that portion of the India which was now his.

This was the psychological explanation of what appeared on the surface to be merely a childish fad.

History records that several countries do rename some of their roads after a revolution, a war or a conquest, or to perpetuate the names of some of its greatest sons. In Paris, after World War I, there came into existence the Avenue Foch; in Russia, after the revolution, St. Petersburg became Leningrad.

But in India after independence they wanted a whole heap of roads renamed; a Jawaharlal Nehru Road, a Sardar Vallabhai Patel Road, a Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya Road, a Lala Lajpat Rai Road, a Shrimati Vijayalaxmi Pandit Road and so many others.

Moreover, the Indians wanted the full names such as one finds only on one's passport. That may have been all right at the beginning when the formal ceremony of the road renaming was done, but in daily use the chances were that the road came to be known by a combination of initials, as in the case of Sir Phirozeshah Mehta Road in Bombay for which the contraction Sir P. M. Road has now been accepted.

All this renaming of streets after Congress leaders was a dangerous precedent to set up in India, for if the reins of government changed hands and the socialists, the communists or the reactionary R.S.S. were to come into power they would want to rename the streets all over again.

Our attitude in respect of commemorating our more revered dead is also quite unique. It was graphically illustrated by a picture which appeared in *The Statesman* of Calcutta. The picture showed the condition of the statue of the late Sir Ashutosh Chatterjee, a great Calcutta figure of the past. On it the citizens of Calcutta had stuck every conceivable type of handbill—advertising movies, political meetings, pain-cures and aphrodisiacs, in addition to the usual marks left by the crows and the pigeons. This was the normal fate of the men whose memory we tried to honour. But once a year, on the anniversary of Sir Ashutosh's death, the Indians of Calcutta washed him and removed the commercial handbills and paid pious homage and lip service to his memory. He was then garlanded profusely but within a day or so he sank back into oblivion and became once again a good site for commercial advertisements.

Yet all these fads were but trifling in comparison with two major fads of the Congress government which affected the lives and liberties of our people. They were unjustifiable interferences with the normal life of the individual. One was the proposed abolition of horse racing and allied forms of gambling; the other was the introduction of prohibition, at first partial but later aiming at being absolute.

To take racing first: The province of Bombay benefited to the extent of Rs. 11,645,965 and a few odd annas by way of taxes and licence fees during the year ending June 30th, 1948. This apart, the Bombay Municipality, which is the equivalent of the Local County Council, received Rs. 1,720,326, by way of water charged, ground-rent and property-tax, from the Royal Western India Turf Club.[1]

During the year under review the club held thirty-five race meetings and distributed in stake money the large sum of Rs. 3,007,110 in the rough proportion of 80% for Indian-breds and 20% for open events for imported horses. After

[1] These figures are taken from an article by A. F. S. Talyarkhan, sports editor of *The National Standard*.

paying all these taxes, licence fees, charges and stake monies, the Turf Club showed a profit of Rs. 73,810. The average attendance per race day is calculated at only 20,000 approximately, so that the argument of the Congress government that racing is bad for the masses does not hold good.

In a country in which black-marketeers who claim to be nationalists and alleged industrialists were quibbling with the state over the payment of income tax on their pilfered millions, these 20,000 ordinary citizens, who were lovers of the sport of horse-racing, were willingly, gladly and deliberately enriching the exchequer of one single city and province to the tune of approximately twelve million rupees. One single race day held in aid of the hospitals fetched Rs. 756,228. There is no other single organizational attraction that can bring in such response for a cause which is both needy and humanitarian.

The Congress government of Bombay had, however, made up their minds that gambling was, for reasons best known to themselves, injurious to the life of the people of this free country. Their rigid attitude allowed of no argument; nor had they any facts and figures or experience to show or prove their case. They had just decided to experiment with a fad of theirs which assumed that the abolition of gambling would make better Indians of us all. If a Congress minister were asked why gambling was bad for the individual, he replied that the reason was obvious. And when one looked at him with surprise at this answer, he would clarify thus: "Whether it is good or bad, we have decided to abolish racing. The people have put us in power, and we know what is best for the people." The fact remained that quite a few of the 20,000 who attended the Bombay races were Gandhi-capped, *khaddar*-clad Congressmen, who apparently did not share their ministers' belief. In fact they went further and tried to find ways and means, in the typical tradition of the Congressmen, of evading the 12½% betting tax and often of installing themselves as unlicensed and illegal bookmakers, *khaddar* clothes, Gandhi cap and all.

While the Congress government spoke of lifting the moral tone of our people by the abolition of gambling, they seemed to be unmindful of the damage they were doing to thousands of owners, trainers, jockeys, riding boys, grooms

and *sycees* who depended on racing for their livelihood. Several large horse-breeding establishments, dotted all over the country, are getting ready to close down because the breeding of horses other than for racing was not, by itself, lucrative enough to justify their continuation. The odd situation was likely to occur where we would have to import horses from other countries because we had crippled and closed up our own indigenous industry.

Moreover, it seemed such a criminal sacrifice of public revenue to throw away approximately twelve million rupees in one province alone at a time when the same provincial government was finding it necessary to raise the price of education in the shape of school and college fees in order to meet its expenditure in that direction. Other social services such as hospitals, housing and free medical aid were suffering from an acute lack of funds. But the Congress government was adamant. It could see no justification for allowing an "immoral" sport like racing to continue.

Next came prohibition.

In *Sanjeevan,* the official mouthpiece of the Bombay government's Provincial Prohibition Board, one of the Congress ministers aired his pet views on prohibition as part of the crazy dream of a vegetarian and virtuous India. With cool effrontery he claimed that the prohibition scheme was "in answer to the voice of our millions clamouring incessantly for positive action." He pleaded for "a firmer will to banish the evil (drink) from our midst."

It is true that prohibition was part of the Congress policy, chiefly inspired by Mahatma Gandhi. But the fact that the Congress had been elected to power did not necessarily mean that the people had given a mandate for prohibition. So long as the issue of the country's freedom remained unsettled the average Indian preferred to rally behind the all-powerful party rather than pick holes in the various details of its home policy. No Indian had time to consider whether prohibition should or should not be enforced in the future; his main and immediate concern was that the country should be free.

The Congress ministers, however, claimed that irrespective of merit every scheme sponsored by the Congress should automatically have the support of the people. In fact it was

difficult to make Congressmen realize that the blank cheque given to them would henceforward have to be filled in and endorsed by the people; for the Congress had now become only a political party in a free country, whose duty it was to present the country with a programme acceptable to the people. But our new politicians did not think along those democratic lines. They used the unlimited powers which had been given for the attainment of independence to enforce on the country, after freedom was won, policies such as prohibition which had never before come in for serious consideration from the people. The result has been that the more the government have tried to enforce it the stronger has become the opposition of the people, who are finding ever-increasing ways and means of circumventing these irksome restrictions.

Prohibition failed in America not because drinking was a habit with the Americans but because the enforcement of morality by legislation encroached upon individual liberty and upon the rights of the individual to decide the way in which he should live his life. Many Americans who had no marked weakness for alcohol became confirmed drunkards and law-breakers, not because of any inherent streak of viciousness in them but merely to assert themselves against this crudely enforced social reform.

It is characteristic of the new régime in India that it seeks to usher in virtue not by teaching the masses to have correct values and discrimination but by trying to sweep away the temptations of everyday life.

In the *Sanjeevan* article it was claimed that both Hinduism and Islam enjoined upon us to keep clear of vice. The use of religion as an argument for bolstering up prohibition is dangerous. It is a disastrous precedent to set up in a country which was moving towards becoming a secular state.

Drink was not a habit introduced into India by the British. The Brahmins of ancient India were known to have drunk themselves into sadist passions as they performed their gory animal sacrifices. The Moghul courts of the day of the emperors were said to have had an inexhaustible supply of rare wines.

When cow slaughter was sought to be banned by legis-

lation, it was Mahatma Gandhi, a devout Hindu and confirmed vegetarian, who opposed this move on the ground that India was not a theocratic state.

It is therefore unfair of the Congress to quote the Hindu scripture and the holy book of the Moslems to justify a policy which is nothing more than a party fad.

It is true that this fad is to be traced to the gospel of Mahatma Gandhi, who held very definite but personal views on prohibition. But the Mahatma's gospel was the gospel of an ascetic. For instance, he also practised celibacy for the greater part of his life in his desire to renounce the physical pleasures of the world. In any case, prohibition, abstention from meat-eating, and celibacy were issues which were personal to Mahatma Gandhi and were intended by him to be an example to his followers, to be undertaken voluntarily by those who were able to live up to that almost monastic code.

Unfortunately the men who quote Mahatma Gandhi on prohibition have ignored many other principles he laid down which were really fundamental to Gandhian political philosophy. They have ignored his views on civil liberty, on freedom of speech and expression, on the very meaning of democracy. These views can all be found in his many writings in the *Harijan* and *Young India*. It was ironical, therefore, that the Congress governments which flouted his theory and concept of democracy and freedom should quote him only when it suited them to do so.

The cases of breach of the prohibition laws have been mounting. Whole areas which were temperate are to-day packed with illicit distilleries. In Cocanada, on the outskirts of Bombay province, liquor was once distilled only by Christians and Hindus of low caste. The orthodox and the high-caste Hindu, therefore, did not touch it because he felt he would be polluted drinking the grog which low-caste hands had manufactured. When prohibition came, the known distillers of liquor were hustled out of the area by the anti-prohibition squads. But liquor had to be produced and clandestinely the Brahmin tried his hand at it. First he made it for himself and then gradually for a few select friends. As liquor was now being made by the highest caste of Hindu, the religious taint disappeared and soon whole

areas were covered by illicit distilleries. The liquor drinkers of Cocanada therefore increased and soon one out of every five houses in the area became an illicit distillery.

Simon Pereira, columnist of the *Sunday Standard,* reported the table patter of a little dinner party held in the house of Bombay's Prime Minister in May 1949 on the eve of an important by-election. Present at that party was Mr. V. P. Menon, I.C.S. Secretary of the States Ministry, government of India, who was passing through Bombay on his way to Madras in the south. In the course of conversation Mr. Menon, who has a fine sense of humour, suddenly remarked that whatever the Congress record in Bombay, it was squarely beaten by that of the Madras ministry in two particular respects.

"And what are these so remarkable achievements?" he was asked.

"Well," said Mr. Menon looking round the table, "one is the institution of complete prohibition. . . . The other," after a pause, "is the extraordinary development of cottage industry throughout the province."

"Tell me," said the Prime Minister of Bombay, whose interest in the promotion of cottage industry is practically his ruling passion, "about their cottage industry programme. How did they do it?"

"It was simple," said Mr. Menon. "They brought in prohibition and now there's a private still in every cottage."

Loud laughter, Simon Pereira said, greeted the sally.

The *Times of India* correspondent reported that in Bellary, in the same province of achievement, Madras, a camp jail was nearing completion which would accommodate 2,000 prisoners convicted of offences against the prohibition laws of Madras province. The prisoners were to be employed on digging canals.

My mind went back to the day I walked into another "camp jail" the day after it was liberated. It was at Belsen in Hitler's Germany. The inmates of this camp had also been digging. So that when I heard of the camp jails constructed in my country in order to teach new moral values to our people I wondered what the future held in store for us.

The Indian people appear to have sympathy rather than

condemnation for the unfortunate and unlucky "culprits". Prohibition squads have yearly to be strengthened, and their expenditure increases. Meanwhile our ministers are throwing away revenue amounting to millions of rupees accruing from excise duty. When the Prime Minister of Bombay was asked how he would be able to do without this immense revenue when so much more than ever was being required to cope with the expenditure of the social services, education and the refugees, he replied that he was going on with his prohibition scheme notwithstanding the "Go Slow" directive of the government of India, for he would not require their financial help. So that the provincial governments were now discarding even the advice of the government of India.

It is quite obvious that this burden of expenditure will fall on the shoulders of the common man who, in addition to being deprived of his right to drink, will also have to pay with increased taxation for his purity enforced on him. The evangelism of the unhaloed saints in the Congress ministries did not concern itself with the economic aspect of the prohibition case.

The Prime Minister of Bombay said that his government had the support of all sections of the public for prohibition. The camp jail at Bellary, the heavy increase in expenditure for additional police, the growing number of illicit distilleries and the unending series of crushing defeats the Congress have suffered all over the country appeared to refute that vain boast.

XI

THE TEMPER OF THE COUNTRY

THE COMMON MAN OF India had rallied behind Mahatma Gandhi not merely to achieve the theoretical status of a free man. That freedom was to have had some meaning other than that we should have our own national flag, our own national anthem and our own men sitting in the high places which had before been occupied by Englishmen.

The British domination of India had far-reaching economic consequences. The many millions of Indian people believed that it was because of the domination that they were half-starved, naked and hungry; while the wealth of the country was being drained into the pockets of those who had come to our shores as empire builders, used our men, material and labour, and taken away the fruits of the land. Our people had seen the effect of trade agreements ostensibly made between Great Britain and ourselves, where we were represented by Englishmen who claimed to be speaking and feeling with the interests of our country at heart. Under these agreements the rule of imperial preference was evolved—a rule which would be perfectly fair between free countries whose capacity to produce was equal. But in the case of Great Britain and India it resulted in the dumping of a substantial part of Britain's exported goods on to us, while we had hardly any finished products to export. Likewise our people were told, even if they could not see, that the monetary rate of exchange was always favourable to the British.

Indians realized that while the impact of the British had brought them a few benefits of science, engineering and education, none of these benefits had been developed with the vigour necessary to bring out the great potential which lay dormant throughout the years of domination.

They criticized the enormous sums spent on items like defence and police while a meagre portion of our revenues was allocated to social welfare, medical relief and education.

Our farmers were backward people, uneducated in the

ways of modern scientific farming, unaware of how the rest of the world planned its production and marketed its goods. It was only because our land was rich in itself that, when the rains fell, the crops grew. God and nature and a few primitive implements were all that helped the farmer with his crop. Years of hard labour of making the land produce without knowledge of how to replenish the richness of the soil had left the millions in our villages on the border-line of starvation, with a wage-earning capacity lower than anywhere else in the world, with children littering the countryside with bloated but empty stomachs and an emaciated breed of men increasing in numbers but deteriorating with every generation, both in mind and body. Poverty, squalor, hunger, disease were the only things they knew, the only problems they had to solve. There was no hope for them so long as the foreign rule lasted .That was the firm belief in India.

Under our own government, a people's government, the common man believed—as he had been taught to believe—that his miserable plight would end; that his harvests would be richer and that he would have a fair share of the wealth of his land and of the fine things it had to offer; that in time he would have something better to live in than the grass and cow-dung hut in which he had been born and in which his ancestors had lived and died; that the bullock-cart, which was the only method of transport he knew other than his own two feet, would disappear from the village scene, and that modern machines would come to his village and tractors would plough his land and make it easier for his crops to grow; that science would bring him new aids when God and the elements were found to be less kind; that his children would have free schools in which to learn to read and write, and that his woman would see more of life than on her daily amble to the village well.

The people had confidence that during the years of the struggle, a constructive programme was being planned. Those they depended on to lead them in the future, who could so easily see the faults of the British, would, of course, have the solutions to the many problems of the country at their finger-tips. They had heard of the various economic planning committees who had been working out various

schemes which were to form part of what was to be virtually a socialist programme for India, complete with nationalization of certain key industries and, in general, the nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange. The people hoped there would be some sort of equitable redistribution of wealth, an equality of opportunity, a breaking down of the barriers. The common man of India thought that with the installation of an Indian national government at New Delhi a millennium would be ushered in. He had traced all our troubles to our state of dependence and believed that in a free India, governed by our own leaders, these troubles would end. The monies made by the sweat of Indian labour would henceforth stay in the country and be circulated back to the people.

To-day this same Indian is bitterly disillusioned, for his plight is worse than it ever was. All the idealism which was to be found in the plans and resolutions of the Congress, prior to 1947, somehow fizzled out when the time came to put those plans into action.

One day Pandit Nehru unexpectedly admitted that after a few months in harness he had become a wiser and more cautious man. He declared that all his idealism was not very practical at the present moment. When it came to the question of nationalizing certain industries, which the Indian expected to be nationalized, the Pandit discovered that these industries were obsolete!

The nationalization of existing industries was, therefore, indefinitely shelved. The government virtually admitted that it had neither the funds, the spare time nor the trained personnel to take them over. This *volte-face* was announced on April 7th, 1948, in a speech the Prime Minister made in the Dominion Parliament.

The one-time revolutionary socialist, Pandit Nehru, was now heard to say: "There is a great deal of difference between theory and practice." In a speech punctuated by "nevertheless" and "this-and-that's" he said:

"One has to be very careful that in taking any step the existing structure is not injured too much.

"In the state of affairs in the world and in India to-day, any attempt to have a clean slate, that is, a sweep-away of

all that we have got, would certainly not bring progress nearer, but might delay it tremendously.

"If we spend vast sums of money on acquiring THIS AND THAT we would be acquiring things which were 90 per cent. obsolete to-day.

"There is a great deal of difference between theory and practice. All manner of difficulties crop up in implementing a theory.

"There has been destruction and injury enough and certainly I confess I am not brave and gallant enough to go about destroying much more.

"I think there is room for destruction in India still of many things. They would, no doubt, have to be removed. NEVERTHELESS, there is a way of approach.

"Perhaps there never has been a clean slate even when people imagined that there was going to be a clean slate. NEVERTHELESS, there could be more or less a clean slate.

"The alternative to that clean slate was to try and rub out here and there. . . . But, NEVERTHELESS, not with a great measure of destruction, etc., in its trail.

"Maybe I have been affected by recent events but more and more I have felt that it is wrong to destroy something that is producing something or doing good.

"I have no doubt in my mind that we have to change this existing structure and as rapidly as possible.

"The lament of burdens that are put on industry, taxation, THIS AND THAT is based on a certain view of the world, which, I fear. cannot possibly come back.

"I am not thinking in idealistic or any terms but practical terms when I say that you cannot have it back."

Having fumbled all the way through that important statement of policy and made a speech which, in its rambling, could only be likened to some of the utterances of the late Ramsay Macdonald, Pandit Nehru came to the point: "One has therefore to compromise, much as I hate the word," he said.

"It is an odd thing," India's first Prime Minister now discovered, "that most of our ardent revolutionaries who think in terms of an idealistic world are quite extraordinarily conservative in their scientific approach to the world's problems."

"*Nevertheless . . . !*"

That, coming from a man who had made many a thrilling

speech in the days of the British, painting pictures of the India we were to build under freedom—an India which was to be strong and unafraid—was an anticlimax. It shattered the faith of many thousands in the power of his dynamic leadership. The blunt truth was better expressed by a prominent Congress leader, who told the people: "You have been slaves for two hundred years. Now that your own men are in office, why can't you have patience for a few years?"

Our liberation, therefore, had yet to come—with patience!

Freedom, we found, remained as far away from our people as ever. The halter of domination still weighed upon them. If it was not by the imperialism of a foreign power, it was by the dictatorship of an indigenous political party, which was just as bad.

Not many people in India, however, are able to see the underlying similarity between the two régimes. They are a bit dazzled by the outward trappings of freedom.

The twisted processes of historical development are not always appreciated in a state which is newly born and the warp and weft of political events in India during these early days has not assumed too quickly a clearly discernible pattern. Even so, under the shifting trends of Indian politics, the common man of India is able clearly to see and feel an overwhelming pull towards the establishment of a despotic rule by the very men who, in their time, had fought the despotism of a foreign power.

Perhaps the most bitter realization that came to the intelligent, educated Indian was that the government of free India had become a testament of fascism. It made all the long years of struggle against the British now appear somewhat futile.

No clearer evidence of that growing tendency towards a fascist dictatorship could be found than in the fact that the new régime was depending even more on the military and the police than the British had done. The "rice soldiers" may have got a change of diet under their new masters but their routine of work appeared to be much the same. Ironically, the army budget, which our leaders once regarded as crippling to the country's economy, was increased and stood at Rs. 1,150,000,000, about three times the figure to which

the Congress had vowed they would scale it down. One high-ranking Congressman, however, explained: "The armed forces do not function as instruments of any foreign power but as patriotic citizens whose sole aim is to see that law and order are maintained."

Explanations like these were intended to soften the blow to the average Indian and help him understand why every promise made to him was now being broken.

* * * * *

Early in 1949 Pandit Nehru observed that he did not like "the temper of the country".

The Prime Minister had apparently noticed that millions of working-class men were losing the incentive to work. They had become sullen and rebellious. They were resorting to strikes and stoppages of work with increasing frequency without consideration of the effect their action would have on the economy of the country.

The country was generally becoming restive and dissatisfied, with violence not infrequent at the lowest income levels. This took the form of armed peasant riots against grain collectors, stoning of urban police during wage demonstrations and destruction of factory properties by strikers. Though the organizing of these upheavals and disorders was often Communist, they were only made possible because of a growing antipathy towards Congress administrations which were daily becoming more and more repressive.

This criticism of government, constructive and destructive, did not come only from the lower and uneducated income groups. It frequently came from the highest levels of business. As one prominent industrialist retorted: " 'The temper of the government' also leaves much to be desired."

It was ironical but true that, in free India, Indian industrialists who in the days of the struggle filled the Congress party coffers with generous donations were now losing their incentive for enterprise; they were reluctant to invest their capital in new projects and ventures; they were becoming cautious and distrustful of their own governments. The industrialist explained his reticence by pointing out that he had no guarantee of any stability in the country; he

could have no pact with labour, no fair deal from the government. The government itself had not yet made up its mind about its policy towards industry and private enterprise. Too many members of the government and of the Congress party were expressing divergent opinions on what this policy should be. There was nothing clear-cut for the industrialist. He was not inclined to start new ventures when all the profits therefrom would go into taxes and when there was every likelihood of the new industry being nationalized. In the present state of indecision, the industrialist preferred to leave it to the government to start its own industries.

It was not as if there was a "strike of capital" in the sense that capital was not forthcoming. It was more than that. The government was waking up to the fact that as a result of their various policies India had little or no private resources left for large-scale industrial development. The government itself had squeezed them out in more ways than one. Heavy income-tax and super-tax were gradually wiping out that capital which normally would have been attracted by new schemes of industrial development. Men and women who were accustomed to live on large incomes now found their incomes so badly slashed and their liquid cash so absorbed by expenses that there was no surplus left to invest in any enterprise, public or private. The only people left who could afford to make big investments were the black-marketeering class who were afraid to bring their money out into the open for fear of being asked awkward questions.

All these circumstances combined to make it necessary for many individual projects, announced in the past two years, to be shelved for lack of investor response. The government itself was having a very rough time with its own borrowing. It had optimistically charted out a borrowing campaign for 1948/49 at roughly £112 million or Rupees 1,500 million. It was forced to cut it back to about half the amount, approximately £62 million or Rs. 830 million; and eventually the government succeeded in raising only about one-third, approximately £40 million or Rs. 530 million.

In the early stages of these loan flotations, the Reserve Bank of India used its influence to induce the various banks of India to take up large blocs of these initial issues, thus

hoping to bolster up the market price of the loans and step up public confidence in the new flotations. Indian leaders at the same time made passionate appeals to the people to come forward and invest their money in these new government securities, but the blunt truth was soon brought home to the government that the people wanted to hang on to what little they had left rather than risk it in government paper.

Heavier taxes, which had now run up to 98% in the top brackets, hundreds and thousands of refugees now compelled to live on their capital, a population increase of as much as 4,000,000 annually and a war-created demand for more goods and utility services, made the price of living in all income brackets soar higher every day. Consequently national savings sank rapidly. According to the better-informed economists in the country, India's pre-war savings rate may have been 6% to 7%, but to-day it cannot touch much above 2%.

Currency notes in circulation in India to-day have jumped up to seven or eight times their pre-war figure—from £127 million pre-war to a height of nearly £1,000 million, and now stand at £870 million. These notes are backed by our sterling balance with Britain which once amounted to more than £1,500 million. That balance, which is our only substantial foreign exchange credit, has now dwindled to little more than half that figure.

The temper of the country has been conditioned by this abnormal inflation.

In domestic life, the temper was reflected in the complaints of housewives at the exorbitant prices charged for food, groceries, oil and other articles in daily use. The tradesmen spoke of increased difficulties in obtaining any goods at all. Producers, in turn, spoke of the difficulties in obtaining raw materials and of the rising cost of labour. With our trade balances going daily against us, more and more difficulty was being experienced in getting foreign currencies for the purchase of goods from abroad. Import licences were a racket, a major item of trade on the black market. Add to all this the hoarding, the squeezing out, the freezing of stocks, indulged in by the men who throve on these ways of shady business, and it completed the set

of circumstances which determined the temper of the country.

"The temper of the country" which Pandit Nehru did not like was reflected also in the growing number of young, able-bodied, mentally sound men who were unemployed. One single *Situation Vacant* advertisement produced many hundreds of applicants. When the young men came up for an interview one noticed the sallow, hungry, desperate look on their faces. They wore no *khaddar* clothes, no Gandhi-caps. These past symbols of struggle were to-day only hallmarks of prosperity. Then men who were unemployed had no urge to wear *khaddar* and the Gandhi-cap. They wore what they could lay their hands on. Their fraying clothes bore witness to the economic deterioration that was setting in.

There was a very dangerous trend discernible among the younger generation. Owing to increase in school and college fees, in the cost of education, and in the general cost of living, many of this younger generation were leaving their studies and beginning to dabble in political activity, offering themselves as volunteers and workers in the many other political organizations of the country. In order of popularity they were joining the Communists, the R.S.S. and the Socialists.

Perhaps more than in any other way the mood of a discontented India was reflected in the change in the attitude of labour towards the Congress party. Labour, a sturdy pillar of the Congress throughout the national movement, had now become its weakest prop. Parts of it were even flaking off amid scenes of disorder and bloodshed.

The Indian working man is no longer apathetic to his age-long abnormally low level of living. Instead of finding his condition improved, he realizes now that he is up against an inflation in which he is worse off than he was before the war. The rise in wages and the dearness allowance which he now draws still keep him far below the standard of wage-earning required to meet the upward trend of the cost of living. The value of the rupee is deteriorating faster than the rate at which his wages are being increased. Hardly a day passes in India without some small pitched battle being fought between the workers and the forces of authority.

Industrial courts and tribunals have tended to side with the working man in disputes and adjudications between capital and labour. Even so, the truth is that in view of the rise in the cost of living the working man cannot get, even from the tribunal, a living wage, for the payment of such a living wage would often cause a particular industry to fold up. As one American observer put it: "Management, production and labour [in India] are all based on universal inefficiency which might be summed up: Ten men drawing five men's pay for two men's work."

The unrest in labour is to be noticed in the rise of Unionism throughout the country. It is estimated that 2,500,000 industrial workers comprise the membership of the various unions.

Organized in 1947 as an offshoot of the Congress party is the Indian National Trade Union Congress whose membership claim runs to 900,000. This figure is a disappointment to the Congress because the party bosses had directed every Congress-minded working man to join. Other, more left, organizations, controlled by the Socialists and the Communists, made their claims somewhat as follows: The Hind Mazdoor Sabha (Indian Workers' Association), 500,000; the All-India Trades Union, 400,000; the Indian Federation of Labour, 230,000. There is a number of smaller outfits.

The odd thing is that while the I.N.T.U.C., which is Congress-dominated, controls the largest single number of members and plays an important part in domestic and international labour talks, it becomes impotent even over its own membership when, against the Congress government's directive, labour gets into the mood to strike.

This may not seem so unusual, for elsewhere in the world, as in Great Britain, Arthur Deakin does not always succeed in keeping his Transport and General Workers' Union behind the British Socialist party. But the method which the government of India employs in such an eventuality *is* unusual. For when labour goes into effective opposition the Public Security Measures Act becomes the Indian government's decisive answer. It is the master key.

It does not take long for a Congress government, whether of the Centre or of the Provinces, to say that a certain

labour leader or a group are "acting or likely to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety". So without any further ado they can be arrested without a warrant, jailed without any specific charge, denied a trial and, in some cases, refused even the right of *habeas corpus*.

Pandit Nehru said that the present temper of the nation seemed more psychological than anything else. I do not think he realized how right he was. That mood results from their feeling of having been betrayed.

This changed mood in the country has put the fear of God into many a Congress leader. It is to be seen in the way "popular" ministers move about the country with heavy armed guards and secret police escorts. Eight months after freedom, more precisely in April 1948, the Congress party held its first annual session since taking over the reins of government. The nation's leaders came to this historic session which was held in Bombay. An amazing number of police constables and plain-clothes men kept guard over our "popular" leaders. It made the common man of India wonder why, so soon after the Congress had come into power, its leaders considered themselves unsafe in the midst of their own people in a city like Bombay, perhaps the most politically conscious and patriotic city in India.

Why were they so afraid? From whom were they protecting themselves, if they were so popular?

In a country where hero-worship is very strong and where top-ranking Congress leaders have always been placed on a pedestal and revered, these extraordinary precautions taken were a pointer to a declining popularity and perhaps to a declining leadership.

On the bookstalls of every town and city in India there is a popular book of history being openly sold. On page 361 the following words appear:

" . . . Ideas and economic conditions make revolutions. Foolish people in authority, blind to everything that does not fit in with their ideas, imagine that revolutions are caused by agitators. Agitators are people who are discontented with existing conditions and desire a change and work for it. . . . But tens and hundreds of thousands of people do not move to action merely at the bidding of an

agitator. Most people desire security above everything, they do not want to risk losing what they have got. But when economic conditions are such that their day-to-day suffering grows and life becomes almost an intolerable burden, then even the weak are prepared to take risks. It is then that they listen to the voice of the agitator who seems to show them the way out of their misery. . . . On the memorable day, 14th July 1789, . . ."

The author of that history book was Jawaharlal Nehru. In another book of his, his *Autobiography* (page 544), the same Socialist revolutionary said:

"If there is one thing that history shows it is this: that economic interests shape the political views of groups and classes. Neither reason nor moral considerations override these interests. . . . The attempt to convert a governing and privileged class into forsaking power and giving up its unjust privileges has always so far failed, and there seems to be no reason whatever to hold that it will succeed in the future. . . . To think, therefore, in terms of pure conversion of a class or nation or of the removal of conflict by rational argument and appeals to justice, is to delude oneself. It is an illusion to imagine that a dominant imperialist power will give up domination over a country, OR THAT A CLASS WILL GIVE UP ITS SUPERIOR POSITION AND PRIVILEGES UNLESS EFFECTIVE PRESSURE, AMOUNTING TO COERCION, IS APPLIED."

Here was a man able to analyse accurately the causes of revolutions in history and to gauge the temper of his own country during the days of "a dominant imperialist power", yet, when he became the Prime Minister of India on the threshold of its new, free life, all he could say to his restless people was: "There is a great deal of difference between theory and practice."

It was a great pity.

XII

GLAMOUR IN LIQUIDATION

GLAMOUR BELONGED TO THE Orient long before it was discovered in Hollywood. It was the glamour of a way of living unknown in the west. In the seventeenth century fantastic tales were carried to Europe by the traders who came to India; tales of rajas and nabobs, of jewels, silks and unbelievable wealth, of harems and women in purdah, of retinues of servants, of bejewelled elephants and strings of horses, of an oriental splendour which to the west appeared more legendary than real.

In part these tales were true. There was wealth and there were priceless jewels. They have belonged to a few hundred out of the millions that lived on the land. These few were the feudal lords, the old Indian rulers, left in their spheres of sovereignty by the British so as to be assured always of loyal bases all over the country. They were safeguards to the continuation of the British domination over India.

The Butler Committee and the Simon Commission had listed 562 Indian states. The joint committee on Indian constitutional reform mentioned a vague round figure of 600. A more recent White Paper, issued by the States Ministry which came into being after August 1947, made a more careful count of 584.

Each state had its ruling prince. The smallest of these princes ruled over forty-six square miles and boasted 26,000 people as his subjects; the largest of them, His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad, claimed a domain of over 82,700 square miles and over sixteen million people accepted him as their sovereign lord. All these rulers, in varying degrees of importance, power, wealth and influence and with varying number of guns in salute, formed the noble order of the princes of India. As a rule they carried the title of "His Highness".

In addition to the recognized princes there was a large number of princely satellites in the shape of *maharajkumars, tikkarajahs,* which meant sons of rulers and heirs-apparent;

brothers and cousins and a whole crowd of offspring by halfwives and concubines—all of whom claimed to belong to the princely order and hung around the central figure of the ruling prince.

While in theory, by treaties made with the British, these Indian ruling princes had the status of sovereigns, in reality they were mere puppets in the hands of the Political Department of the government of India and had to keep themselves in the good books of the British Resident or Political Agent to whom the Political Department had entrusted the power of "guiding" each Indian prince.

The son of a well-known Indian ruler once told me how in reality the Resident was the all-in-all:

"Father would one day suddenly wake up to the fact that the people of our state were extremely backward in education. He would call his ministers into conference and ask them to start some campaign for education, plan a few new schools and generally prepare a scheme for the educational uplift of his subjects. The ministers would go away and after a few months some plans would be submitted to father. Monies would be found to put the new scheme into operation and when all was ready father would send for the Resident and tell him all about it. The Resident would bow, call my father 'Your Highness' and pay the usual courtesies, but he would not commit himself. Instead he would go away and consider the new scheme. That meant he wanted to write to the Political Department about it and get his orders. Some two weeks later the Resident would call on father again and in the course of conversation the educational scheme would crop up. The Resident would of course praise the great scheme and say what a wonderful piece of social reform it was, but he would add: 'I wonder, Your Highness, with all due deference to Your Highness and your advisers, whether it would be wise to put into effect such a bold, far-reaching reform in the immediate future. Perhaps it would be better to synchronize it with the government's schemes for further education in the country when, I am sure, it would be even more appreciated.' "

"That meant NO," the young prince told me. "Father could do damn all after that."

"But surely," I asked, "as a ruler he had the right to do what he wanted in his own state. No one could question his internal administration, especially when it was obviously for the benefit of his people."

"Theoretically, yes," my friend explained. "If he had put those schemes into operation, the Resident could not have stopped them, nor even the Political Department, but father would have had a black mark put up against him. He would have opposed the will of the powers that be. Their trust in him would have been withdrawn. They would have waited for some incident or the other to happen in which father had tripped, then out he would go, for they could always force a prince to abdicate. You know how often they've done it. It doesn't pay in the long run."

"But surely, if you don't give the Political Department a chance by staying clear of trouble and singing girls, you need have no fear?"

My friend laughed. "What Indian prince can stay clear of singing girls or women in general? In fact that's the most important portfolio in the state."

Women came easy to these Indian princes. First their scouts would scour the neighbouring and far-off states for a suitable bride for the ruler or the heir-apparent when he came of marriageable age. All that was done at state level, it being borne in mind that unions within the princely order strengthened the bonds of friendship between state and state and became assets in matters like voting in the Chamber of Princes and on such other occasions. When the young man stepped on to the *gadi* (throne), marriage became part of his princely obligations and he became entitled to relaxation and pleasures to relieve the boredom of being a ruler who had sacrificed his life for the sake of his people.

A different set of scouts then scoured the state for such samples of womanhood as would please the ruler's fancy and meet with his approval. The ruler would then send for the father of the girl, or maybe even her husband, and speak of his pleasure to have the girl for himself. He would, of course, pay compensation to the person to whom the woman at that time belonged. If the father or the husband realized what an honour the prince was doing him by

choosing his daughter or wife as a royal concubine, well and good. If not, then reason had to be brought to bear on these obstreperous individuals in some form or another. But the girl invariably came to the royal prince who used her at his will and pleasure.

When the prince got tired of her, she was relegated to the harem where she spent the rest of her life in the company of other women who had come to the palace like her, perhaps with an offspring or two which became part and parcel of the prince's personal encumbrances.

Sometimes a husband or a father would persist in trying to get the daughter or wife back and would be so foolish as to approach the Political Department of the government of India. Unluckily then the girl would have an accident and die and that was when the good offices of the Resident and the Political Department would be most helpful to the prince, for it was the Political Department which had to interpret what had really happened to the deceased girl. There was never any scope for an independent inquiry. The matter could be easily hushed up.

And so on to the next girl . . . perhaps her people would give less trouble.

Generally speaking, the princes of India have not been noted for any great culture, refinement, high principles or education. There are, of course, notable exceptions but on the whole the average man's opinion of the Indian prince was that he had "too much money and too little brains". All of them, even the educated among them, walked about with the air of those on whom destiny had bestowed greatness. They received the deep bowing salutes of their subordinates, subjects and menials. The concept of the equality of man never occurred to them. Perhaps it was definitely discouraged during their early training and upbringing. Even those who were educated abroad acquired a sort of dual personality, a dual manner of behaviour. One was for the outside world—humble, courteous, enlightened; the other was for inside the state—pompous, arrogant, patronizing, boorish, varying in degree with the individual.

The British did not want the princes to think too much on democratic lines. These feudal and backward states were checks on a progressive India which was then making in-

creasing demands on the paramount power. By pointing to the position of the princes, the British hoped they could postpone the day of the transfer of power.

When events did not turn out according to plan and the British decided to quit, the position of the princes became very anomalous. Their sovereignty was guaranteed by the presence in India of British troops and when these were removed the princes with all their paper treaties fell on the mercy of the new government of India. They were "advised" by Lord Mountbatten to accede to the Indian Union or Pakistan, according to their geographical position, but in any case to give up the pretence of an independent sovereignty which they could no longer maintain.

Hurried conferences were held between the princes and their advisers. They reviewed their position in terms of the new Indian set-up, in the midst of which they found themselves without their erstwhile protectors.

These conferences went through several stages. The first stage was at the constitutional and legal level and much was said about the sovereign rights of these princes and how they could be upheld in the courts of law and of international justice. The blunt truth, however, was that there was now no sanction left to ensure that this so-called justice claimed for the princes could be carried out even if the highest tribunals were to decide in their favour. The British were not going to fight a war with the Indian Union to uphold the sovereign rights of any of their former puppets. The state ruler claiming independence would as a last resource have to fall back upon his own state forces to uphold their ruler's rights, and some of the state soldiers appeared more suited to musical comedy!

There were a few emphatic protests and representations made by the princes themselves which came up for hearing before Sardar Patel, a man who was strongly against the princely order. The appeals, protests and even threats were, however, of little avail. The majority of the princes soon realized that it was better to take half the cake than to have no cake at all.

The second stage of the conferring and advising resulted in the princes realizing that it was to their own benefit and advantage to merge into the Indian Union, for, as many of

them discovered one enlightened morning, it was to their advantage to move and work with the forces of progress rather than remain backward as the British had kept them! No one was happier to hear this than the government of India and in particular Sardar Patel, whose handling of these princes had been a trifle high-handed but masterly.

Within a fortnight of the partition plan being announced, Patel, almost unnoticed in the general excitement of more spectacular happenings, decided to set up a new department to deal with the states. This department became known as the States Ministry. By June 25th the Cabinet sanction to this new ministry had been obtained. By July 5th the States Ministry had quietly come into existence, with Sardar Patel automatically taking charge of the department which he had created.

Sardar Patel was the ruthless party boss of the Congress. As long as Gandhi's was the inspiration and the brain which launched the movements of civil disobedience, Sardar Patel was the organizer who put those ideas and plans into actual effect. The whole peasant revolt in Gujerat which Gandhi conceived would only have been a nebulous dream without the driving force of Sardar Patel. It is perhaps true to say that while Gandhi was the architect of India's freedom, Patel was the most important building contractor.

As the national movement increased in momentum, the Sardar began to acquire an individuality and a mind of his own. He had the sense never to oppose the Mahatma, but after the Mahatma's death the individuality of Sardar Patel often came into conflict with Pandit Nehru's ideology.

However, on the issue of the states, Patel was given a free hand and, while Pandit Nehru took the bow on the international stage and at home, Sardar Patel in his silently ruthless fashion began his new movement for the mass liquidation of the princely order.

In an article written for *March*, G. N. Acharya, chief reporter of the *Bombay Chronicle*, and one of the ablest young men in the journalistic profession, described the changing map of India.

Acharya spoke of the old days when the princes had to deal with British bureaucrats. The visit of a viceroy, a governor or even a political agent, would then have necessi-

tated arrangements for a *shikar*, a banquet, at which cases of matured Scotch and good wines were served. Perhaps an occasional pearl necklace was given to the bureaucrat's wife as a memento of her visit to the state. Some paper oratory was prepared for the occasion by an underpaid hack. That ended the worries of the prince *pro tem*.

"But on 14th December, 1947," Acharya said, "the princes of the Orissa states gathered in Cuttack for an altogether different job. They had been summoned by a *khaddar*-clad man of rustic origin who was not interested in *shikar*. The princes shuffled uneasily as Sardar Patel spoke to them. They wanted to parley but could only whimper. One or two of them wanted to be classed as 'Class A' states instead of 'B'."

"Settle these details with Menon," said the Sardar. Menon was the newly-elected secretary of the States Ministry, another man of rustic origin—a self-made man who had served as a clerk to the Secretariat for several years on a salary of Rs. 50. Of the hundreds of Menons in India, his initials were "V. P".

That was the brief scene between the Honourable Minister for the States and the princes of the Orissa states.

"A similar scene was enacted at Government House, Nagpur, the next day. Fourteen rulers of Chattisghar States, mostly hill and jungle area, inhabited by backward tribal people, faced the soft-spoken Sardar. The conference was over in a matter of minutes. Resistance took the form of pathetic appeals for generous treatment."

The next day Sardar Patel was back again in New Delhi. He issued a statement in which he made two points; one, that democratization of the administration of these states had become a pressing problem; two, that where, on account of the smallness of the state, inadequacy of resources, or lack of a modern system of government, a state was unable to keep pace with the times, its integration into a unit of the Indian Union was indicated in order to make democratization possible.

The strange doings at Cuttack and Nagpur appeared in bits and snatches in the Press. The statement of the Sardar received considerable publicity. No one, however, understood what all this meant until New Year's Day, 1948,

when the government of India announced that these states with whom the Sardar had been "parleying" had MERGED with the neighbouring provinces of India.

Acharya said: "By a simple Gazette notification, without war or bloodshed, 39 different states, covering an area of 56,000 miles with a revenue of Rs. 20,000,000 and a population of 7,000,000, had lost their separate identities. The mass liquidation of the princely order, the greatest campaign for the elimination of the monarchy known to history, had begun."

There could be no two opinions on the point. A country like India could not possibly progress if these backward, feudal states dotted the land from north to south, east to west. On the question of defence, foreign policy and communications, it was obvious that every state, however large and democratic, had to take direction from the Indian government. One could not have, for instance, the Nizam of Hyderabad making a treaty with Soviet Russia, if that were possible, while the government of India had thrown in its lot, if that were also possible, with the British Commonwealth or the Anglo-American axis.

When the whole country ostensibly fought for democracy and freedom, the right to have a government of the people, by the people, for the people, the right to have freedom of speech and expression, liberty of the Press and other such rights which are to be found in a true democracy, these rights could not in theory be denied to the Indian people. If, therefore, the Indian princes had to remain they could do so only as titular heads, leftovers from a former set of circumstances, which one did not want to throw out overnight. Their liquidation had to be smooth and gradual because too revolutionary an attitude towards the princes might also be a bad precedent to set up in India where the people were already in a mood for drastic action in matters of this kind.

In fact, as later events proved, the Congress which spearheaded this democratic move in the Indian states was found to be giving silent support to many a ruler who had long outlived his usefulness, only because the Congress felt—as the British had once done—that the presence of these princes in the states might prove safety valves in a country

which was wanting to break out and swing to the extreme left. The government of India is said to have preferred to have a prince on the throne whom they could later quietly dispossess than to chance the Communists getting a grip over the subjects of the "late ruler".

* * * * *

One well-known Indian prince whose splendour was deflated was His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda. The Gaekwar was not much known abroad until he decided at the end of World War II to race in England on a scale comparable to that of the Aga Khan. The Gaekwar bought for himself one of the most expensive stables in England. He also appeared at the bloodstock sales where his bid for Sayajirao broke all records. Gradually he bought for himself the pick of English bloodstock and he raced in England on as magnificent a scale as any of the wealthiest men of the world.

While all was lovely at Ascot, Epsom and Newmarket, the Gaekwar had his problems at home. One pack of trouble arose out of his marriage to his second wife, Sita Devi, the daughter of the Raja of Pittapuram, a large and wealthy landowner in the south. This marriage, as is publicly known, created a domestic crisis. The other set of problems arose out of his long absences from the state, and the simultaneous changes in the attitude of the government of India to the princely order in India.

H.H. the Gaekwar of Baroda made no show of any opposition. He agreed to the popular demand for a constitutional government to replace his nominated set of advisers. He also was among the first to accede to the Indian Union as soon as independence was declared.

In an article which appeared in *March* (December 29th, 1948), Vasudeva Rao described the *durbar* ceremony at which the Gaekwar announced the formal transfer of all ruling powers to a new council of seven ministers, representing the people of his state.

Vasudeva Rao says:

"The ceremonial court was held in the spacious hall of the great palace. History was immediately created and pre-

cedent broken when guests were permitted to attend without headdress. A few noblemen came in their red and gold turbans, but there were many, especially the new Ministers, with the white Gandhi-cap and *dhoti.*

"Leading the Maharaja into the hall came the stocky new Prime Minister, Dr. Jivaraj Narayan Mehta, once Mahatma Gandhi's personal physician and Director General of Medical Services in the government of India.

"Two Maharashtrian courtiers in tight trousers heralded the Maharaja's arrival with a brief narration of the ruler's lineage and the martial traditions of Baroda State. Now Sir Pratap Sinha Gaekwar was almost immediately giving up all his ancient powers and many of the trappings of pomp and position.

"Appropriately enough the Maharaja wore a simple dress of loose satin trousers and long silk coat with gold buttons. There was no emerald-studded crown, no gorgeous coat of gold, no necklace of precious stones such as he wore for his birthday *durbar.*

"The palace attendants were dismayed by the ruler's unorthodox public appearance, and politely reminded him of the ceremonial nature of the meeting. 'The occasion does not permit a show of ostentation,' answered the Maharaja, 'it rather calls for sackcloth and ashes.'

"As the ceremony proceeded I heard a gentle rustle through the stillness in the hall as Her Highness Maharani Shantadevi, the Maharaja's first wife, with her eight children, peeped through the silken-draped balcony above.

". . . I watched the ceremony to its end. The burden of ruling having been cast aside, the Maharaja took the opportunity of attending the week-end horse-races at Poona."

Vasudeva Rao in this article was not so much concerned with His Highness the Maharaja Gaekwar of Baroda, whose annual privy purse of £350,000 had remained untouched by the new administrative changes and who had vast personal riches of his own to keep him in luxury, as he was with the thirty-year-old elephant, Bhim, who now stood unemployed and unwanted in a garden on the edge of Baroda city, because the age of splendour was about to pass away from princely India. Eight months ago Bhim had carried his master on the occasion of his birthday in a procession which would long be remembered for its gorgeous splendour. The "good old days" had ended for Bhim who

would never again don the rich trappings he wore on those ceremonial occasions. The ancient symbols of pomp and pageantry would soon become only a memory for Bhim and his master.

If this liquidation of the princes of India was only motivated by a democratic urge to uplift the status of the state subjects, it would be without question a most commendable idea. The trouble was that many well-known Congressmen were trying to cash in on this process of liquidation by offering to intervene with the government on behalf of the ruler, it being always understood that their friendly intervention would be duly appreciated by the grateful prince.

This could easily be proved, but the very fact that Congressmen who were of no official standing but were well connected suddenly appeared on the liquidating scene, volunteering to help solve a ruling prince's difficulties and reach an understanding with the new government, made it difficult to believe that these same Congressmen, who were known to be opportunists, were exerting themselves out of any personal regard for the poor Indian prince!

So that even in those acts of government which were professedly for the ultimate good of the people, the methods employed by intermediaries who invariably belonged to the Congress party were so despicable that it made the intelligent Indian wonder whether these new men who were coming into power would be any improvement on the feudal, autocratic and even wasteful prince and his handpicked counsellors.

XIII

POLICE ACTION

Not all the states merged so easily and so quickly into the Indian Union. A few of the better known states proved somewhat troublesome. Among these the most notable was Hyderabad over which ruled His Exalted Highness, the Nizam.

When the independence of India was declared, the Nizam took the attitude that, with the departure of the paramount power, he had elected to become an independent sovereign also and that his state would therefore be independent of the Indian Union. With amazing rapidity he appointed his own representatives abroad, including an Agent-General to the United Kingdom. His Exalted Highness contended that his state was a country in itself and that it had resources and wealth which made it self-supporting and self-sufficient.

On the map of India Hyderabad lies in the centre surrounded by the territories of the Indian Union. It may easily be called the "belly" of the sub-continent. It is a vast expanse of rugged land, 82,700 square miles, an area larger than England and Scotland. This area is made up of three sections: Marathwada, Karnatak and Telengana—the last named being the most important, for it was here that the peasants, whipped into action by Communist elements, staged a most effective revolt against the state, the landlord and all official authority. This Telengana revolt is perhaps the most important Communist victory in post-independence India.

Hyderabad has no direct access to the sea. The only port from which it has been known to operate has been that of Goa, which has been until now under Portuguese control. One other fact which must be noted is that although the Nizam is a Moslem, 90% of his 16,338,534 subjects are Hindu.

The present Nizam is Mir Osman Ali Khan. He belongs to the Asaf Jah dynasty. This dynasty dates back to the early eighteenth century, when the Nizam's forefathers were still

in the stranglehold of the powerful Moghul rulers of Delhi. During the Moghul period, the ancestors of the Asaf Jah's were chieftains of the Emperor Aurangzeb. If any blue blood ran in their veins, the Moghuls did not recognize it.

Prowess on the field of battle earned for one Kamrooden the honour of being entrusted by the emperor with the administration of the Deccan, with the rank of *Subedar* and the title of Nizam. To-day in the Indian army a *Subedar* would be a Viceroy's commissioned officer, but in those days it meant the Viceroy himself. Moreover, Kamrooden was given by the emperor the personal title of Asaf Jah.[1]

The Emperor Aurangzeb died in 1707 and the power of the Moghuls waned thereafter. It was then that Asaf Jah asserted himself as Nizam of Hyderabad, taking unto himself full powers of rulership over an independent state. So that a desire to claim sovereign powers springs up from time to time in the Asaf Jah dynasty.

As the Moghul power waned, the Maharattas, the greatest of whom was Shivaji, appeared on the Deccan scene and in 1795 the then Nizam tasted defeat at the hands of one of the Peshwas,[2] who marched into Hyderabad.

On this occasion the Nizam invoked foreign aid. He had a nodding acquaintance with the French and knew a few Englishmen of the East India Company. It was in Lord Mornington that the Nizam found a most unexpected ally. Mornington offered to stand by the Nizam and in return the East India Company found a friendly fortress in the Nizam's territory. This was important to the British for their empire-building trade.

From those days the Nizams of Hyderabad appear to have been on cordial terms with the British paramount power and after World War I the British recognized the Nizam's many acts of generosity by bestowing upon him the unique title of "Faithful Ally of the Empire". He also came to be known as "His Exalted Highness" as distinct from other Indian ruling princes who were only entitled to be called "His Highness".

The government of Hyderabad had for many years been run by the Nizam's Executive Council, headed by a Prime

[1] "Equal to Asaf", the Grand Wazir of Wisdom.
[2] Maharatta chieftain.

Minister nominated, like the rest of his council, by the ruler himself.

The large majority of states' subjects were *khedoots*, that is, farmers and agricultural workers. They were mostly tenants and sub-tenants of the big landowners. The system of land tenure in the state has been almost feudal in form.

Even before August 1947 a certain amount of political agitation was noticeable among the people of the state. This agitation was focused on the State Peoples' Congress, an offshoot of the Indian National Congress. The latter operated in British India against the British ruling power; the former tried to operate among the peoples of the Indian states against the autocracy of their Indian rulers.

The Hyderabad State Congress was formed in 1938 and made the routine demand for popular representation in the government of the state. The Nizam did not yield to this demand. He was inclined to hold fast to the old-fashioned view that these popular movements were passing phases and he preferred to cling on to the age-long conception of a "benevolent monarchy".

The man who dominated the destiny of over sixteen million people is reputed to be one of the richest men of the world, if not *the* richest. He almost belongs in a world of fable. In his own right he is the owner of some 5,000,000 acres, which are tilled by over a million peasants who work for him. The income from this private estate is estimated at Rs. 50,000,000 per year, in addition to which he draws Rs. 7,000,000 from the state budget for his private purse. He further augments his income by a system of *nazaranas* (gifts) which he does his subjects the honour of receiving on those rare occasions when he bestows on them the favour of an audience.

It is the same idea as that practised by the Aga Khan when he comes to India and his followers come to pay him homage by bestowing gifts. The Nizam does it on a far more impressive scale, with the result that during his long rule he has amassed wealth which is difficult to assess with any degree of precision. His fortune is not only in gold bars, government paper, stocks and shares, land, palaces and property, but also in those countless bags of precious stones the value of which is inestimable.

One of Bombay's leading jewellers once told me the story of a large and most expensive ruby which he took to Hyderabad in the hope of selling it to the Nizam. When the jeweller returned from the palace, he said he was dazed. The Nizam had shown him in turn handfuls of rubies, all of which made this stone look like a pebble.

Romesh Thapar, a young journalist with pronounced leftist tendencies, in a well documented pamphlet, *Storm Over Hyderabad,* has roughly estimated the Nizam's wealth at Rs. 6,000,000,000. Thapar said: "Suffice it to say that the Nizam's income is just under Rs. 400,000."

This is free of income tax! No ruling prince pays income tax.

In spite of this vast wealth, the Nizam is known to be most simple in his habits. His food is that of a poor man. Out of the little that is made for him each day he sends a few spoonfuls to his two sons as a token of his affection for them.

There are other strange habits which he has. For instance, when his car passes along any of the streets of Hyderabad, everyone, except those specially privileged, has to go indoors. It is forbidden that his subjects should see him on the streets.

All these little idiosyncrasies have made him a character difficult to understand. He is part oriental potentate, part feudal monarch, part ascetic. As a hobby he writes couplets of classical Indian poetry. Those who are conversant with this now rare poetic form say that he is remarkable in his power of expression.

The result is that in a world of harsh reality and strife, the Nizam had until the Hyderabad incident surrounded himself with an impenetrable wall of splendid isolation. It was a difficult position for the Nizam to maintain when the protecting hand of the British disappeared from the Indian sub-continent.

It was but natural that at some stage or another this great wealth would come into open conflict with the extreme poverty of his subjects. While the Nizam had often been heard to say: "I always look upon the troubles of my beloved subjects as my own", the mere utterance in no way alleviated this poverty. The network of landlords which

had grown up throughout the state had completely strangled the landless peasant with its demands for levies and rentals, so that to leave Hyderabad as an independent sovereign state right in the centre of India would have meant the perpetuation of a system which the new Indian government had vowed to uproot.

The granting of independent sovereign status to the Nizam would have been an anachronism from many points of view. In the first place it would have been quite absurd if, for instance, the foreign policy of this independent state of Hyderabad had run contrary to ours. And, in the second, the fundamental principles on which the economy of this feudal state was based were completely contradictory to the economy which our new Indian government was pledged to put into effect in free India.

While many in India had foreseen that sooner or later this claim of the Nizam to sovereignty would have to be negatived, the government of India were wise to avoid an immediate conflict on this issue because it would have had unfortunate repercussions for which the country was not at the time prepared. They therefore entered into a standstill agreement with the Nizam, whereby Indian army units, who had so long been stationed at Secunderabad in Hyderabad State, were withdrawn as a concession to the Nizam's claim of sovereignty.

Soon after, the Indian government appointed that shrewd politician Mr. K. M. Munshi as Agent General for India to the Court of His Exalted Highness.

As soon as the Indian army withdrew, the Nizam, on the advice of his counsellors, launched a move to expand his army. To its ranks there now came Arabs and Pathans, many of whom were undesirable characters. Arms and ammunition began to be manufactured in the state. The Birmingham Small Arms Company's wartime factory became the arsenal of the state army. The heir apparent's palace was said to have been converted into a munition factory. The object presumably was to create an army capable of defending that proclaimed independence and sovereignty.

By now a new factor had appeared on the Hyderabad scene. It was the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen, a Moslem political

organization, intensely communal in character. It was originally founded in 1927 for the spreading of Islamic culture and it began to have an intensely political significance in the Hindu-Moslem squabble. Like the Moslem League in India, the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen had a strong hold on the middle- and lower-middle-class Moslems of Hyderabad.

The Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen was as rabidly anti-Hindu as the R.S.S. in India was anti-Moslem. It was fascist in form, fanatic in action and ruthless in the methods employed to achieve its aims.

A very strange character led this marauding band. He was the grey-bearded, Aligarh-educated, Kasim Razvi. Razvi started raising a private army called the Razakars. Armed with all kinds of small arms they could lay hands on, the Razakars went freebooting into the Indian territory which lay on the borders of Hyderabad. They terrorized the unarmed peasants in their own state and in the bordering Indian villages.

In spite of the drilling and parading to which the Razakars were subjected, they always remained an ill-disciplined group of irregulars whose bravery was only to be seen against the unarmed and the defenceless. Their constant raids became a menace to the harmless peasantry and the government of India began to be gravely concerned about the chaos, destruction and anarchy which these irregulars created. The government of India maintained that the Nizam was to be held responsible for these Razakars.

There followed a series of close-shuttered conferences and cross-table debates between the Nizam's representatives and the government of India. The brain behind the Nizam at this time was his constitutional adviser, Sir Walter Monckton, specially sent for from England. For many years Monckton had been advising Indian princes on how to handle the complicated constitutional problems which arose out of their relationship with the British government in India. Now he was advising them on their new position which had materially altered with the quitting of the paramount power.

But what the princes were facing at this time was something more than constitutional crisis. The choice was be-

tween extinction and merger. In however delicate a form this fact may have been couched by the States Ministry, it was quite clear that the princes had eventually to fall in line either voluntarily and with grace or forcibly and with the possible loss of their throne.

In the case of the Nizam, because of the size of his dominion and because of the fact that he was a Moslem ruler, the shrewd Sardar Patel did not precipitate the action he intended to take. He postponed it until the tension in the country had eased and also until he could find a suitable excuse for stepping in on the Hyderabad scene and compelling the Nizam to fall in line with the rest of the princes.

The close-shuttered talks bore no fruit, nor was it intended that they should. The two parties could not possibly have come to any understanding, for the difference between them was on fundamental issues. Obviously the Indian Union could not allow an independent sovereign state to function right in the heart of the Union.

All the Sardar was concerned with was how to liquidate this theoretical concept of sovereignty as gracefully and peacefully as possible.

Unfortunately for the Nizam, however well his case may have been backed up by constitutional law, emotionally it was sustained by a fanatical Moslem following which was at that time naturally anti-Indian. The outbreak of this Razakar fanaticism was crude and gave the Indian Union a lever with which to force the issue. Moreover a stage was soon reached when, whether the Nizam had originally acquiesced in the Razakar movement or not, there was little he could do to bring the situation under control.

Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel played their cards astutely on this occasion. They waited until Indian public opinion had been sufficiently roused to support any action which they might take against Hyderabad and only then did they take it. They gave ample warning to the Nizam and to all outward appearances it could now be justified that it was the long suffering tolerance of the Indian Union which had been tried beyond endurance.

One day, therefore, the Indian government flatly asked the Nizam to disband these marauding Razakars and let Indian troops be stationed once again in Secunderabad in

order to maintain law and order. It is difficult to say what factors the Nizam took into consideration when reaching his decision. Perhaps he was confident of his own power and believed in the might of the army he had raised; perhaps that was the counsel of his advisers; perhaps he believed in the capabilities of his representatives abroad to enlist, if necessary, the help of the United Nations, but he would not budge from the stand he had taken.

It was said that the Razakars also were confident that fighting side by side with the state forces they could hold out for a considerable length of time against an advancing Indian army. The more conservative among them said they could hold out for six months; the optimists believed they could hold out for as long as two years. This belief was based on the experience of skirmishes which the Razakars had had with unarmed peasants, from which they had naturally come out victorious. The Chief of Staff of the Hyderabad army, Col. Napier, had, however, sounded a note of warning to the over-confident militarists before he resigned his commission. The colonel knew that the state forces and the Razakars could never hold out, even for a day, against the organized and well-drilled troops of India.

It happened as this more seasoned soldier had forecast. On September 13th, 1948, the Southern Command launched a pincer movement and our troops, led by three hard-boiled generals, pressured into the state with powerful air support. Sherman, Churchill and Stuart tanks crashed through Hyderabad state territory. They met with hardly any resistance. They fired just a few shots. As the Indian troops drew nearer, the G.O.C. of the Southern Command, Lt.-General Rajendra Singhji, sent a note of warning to Major General El Edroos of the Hyderabad state forces. The note pointed out the futility of the Hyderabad forces attempting to hold out.

The Nizam was quick to realize that the Indian artillery could pound his capital and reduce it to rubble. His own government was in a hopeless state of confusion. His Prime Minister, Mir Laik Ali, had resigned and the Nizam himself had taken over the administration.

So on the evening of the 17th, four days after the action began, the Nizam issued a "Cease Fire" order to his troops.

Simultaneously he banned and outlawed the Razakar organization and permitted the free entry of Indian troops into his state. The ban on the Hyderabad State Congress was lifted, a concession to the Congress leaders who maintained that the State Congress was the means of bringing democracy into this feudal land.

The next morning the Indian army moved in and reoccupied their old barracks at Secunderabad. An Indian military governor was installed in full charge of the government of Hyderabad. To all intents and purposes, Hyderabad had come under stark military occupation.

The Nizam now *voluntarily* withdrew his protest. He even declared that he was only too happy to have the Indian troops back again! In so far as he made this proclamation publicly, we must accept it as a correct statement of his feelings.

So ended the Hyderabad incident which had plagued the Indian Union and, on his own admission, had plagued the Nizam himself.

From the Indian point of view there could have been no two opinions about the government of India's decision to take action to stop Razakar lawlessness for it was clearly affecting our internal security. And the only effective action in the circumstances and after due warning was the strong military action of the type which was taken. It was unsavoury but essential. It was, however, the subsequent claptrap which our leaders produced which stultified the whole affair in the eyes of our own people and of the world.

It made average intelligent Indians squirm to read in their papers the next morning that our leaders had gone into an hysterical frenzy over what they called a "great military victory". Indian telegraph offices could hardly cope with the exchange of greetings and congratulatory messages which followed this "our first great military victory". And overnight the same Congressmen who had once called our soldiers "rice soldiers" now spoke glowingly of their terrific fighting qualities. It was, to say the least, a trifle ridiculous.

The marching of a highly trained Indian army, equipped with all the latest materials of war, into a comparatively backward Indian ruler's state was no military achievement. We would have looked silly if after the crores of rupees we

were spending on the upkeep of our armed forces we had been stopped by an ill-equipped, undisciplined and untrained band of guerrillas led by the enthusiastic amateur who stood between our army and its objective. All the glory our Congress leaders spun round our soldiers and our generals was, therefore, somewhat irksome to those men who had known real fighting on the battlefields of the world.

I remember seeing the men of our 4th Indian Division returning home after World War II. Here was a division which had made history. It had fought and beaten the finest panzers in the Middle East and Italy. It had often spearheaded the whole allied advance against the Germans. Its men had fought against equally matched men and against equal armour. There was not a British, American, German, French or Italian soldier who, seeing these Indians fight, had not admired the gallant Indian Fourth.

But to our Congress leaders at that time, the 4th Indian Division was nothing more than a bunch of "rice soldiers". Not one of those now singing pæans of praise about our army in Hyderabad had had the common decency to welcome these fighting men when they returned home after the war. Congress leaders could not see acts of heroism apart from the politics of the day. No one from the Congress had the grace to wave a hand of cheer to these men. Now, because of an effortless victory over much inferior resistance, the Congress had made heroes out of those same "rice soldiers".

While "this military victory" was being claimed by the more naïve among the Congress leaders, Pandit Nehru soft-pedalled the Hyderabad incident and officially called it "police action".

It is unpleasant for an Indian to have to ask his Prime Minister why a lieutenant-general, three major-generals and a whole armoured division had to be called out to effect a mere *police action*. A police commissioner and a handful of sepoys armed with the familiar *lathis* were usually enough for police actions in the days of the British.

The truth was—and let's face it—that our government did not want to give the outside world the impression that India, a member of the United Nations, had had recourse to

military action for the settlement of the Hyderabad dispute. Moreover there was still an articulate section of Gandhian followers, believers in non-violence, who had to be appeased.

Had we said that we were taking Hyderabad by force of arms because we had no other alternative, it would have been an honest statement of fact. World sympathy would, in the circumstances, still have been on our side. But all this pretence of having effected a "police action" was unbecoming to us as a people and equally unbecoming to our government. It drew the harsh comment of Dr. Jose Arce, the Argentinian delegate to the Security Council, who said: "The march of the Indian troops towards the capital of Hyderabad reminds me of the march of Italian troops towards the Abyssinian capital."

We did not like the Argentine's comment but we had asked for it. However right our government was in the action it had taken, the attempts made to camouflage it had brought upon us the odium of having used methods once employed by those fascist countries whose acts of aggrandizement were constantly being explained away as being for the eventual good of the people they were subjugating.

More shrewd observers of the behind-the-scenes happenings in India had yet another explanation for the conquest of Hyderabad. To these knowledgeable observers it became apparent that the government of India's concern over the undemocratic régime of the Nizam was really secondary to their fear of a full-blooded Communist uprising in this central belt.

The first clear manifestation of the Communists getting a foothold in Hyderabad—at Telengana where they succeeded in establishing what was practically a parallel government (*patri sarkar*)—is not new to India. The idea had been successfully tried in 1942 against the British in Satara and our people, who were then still struggling for freedom, had applauded the effort.

Ironically, the same idea was put into effect by the Communists in Hyderabad and the Congress leaders realized only then how dangerous was the precedent they had allowed to be set up.

Telengana comprised the Telegu-speaking districts of

Hyderabad bordering on the Andhra districts of Madras in the south. The government had hitherto paid little attention to Communist activities because right up to December 1947 the Communists appeared to be one with the Congress. They believed, even as Russia did, that in Free India Nehru would snap the British connexion and go with Russia. Both Mrs. Pandit and Krishna Menon gave enough indication at the U.N. and elsewhere of the deep understanding we appeared to have found with the Soviet delegates. The *Peoples Age,* the Communist party organ, was known to have displayed large portraits of Pandit Nehru in several of its post-independence issues. And Nehru was okayed by the Kremlin.

Soon after this, the wartime alliance between Russia and the democracies began to wear thin. World Communist forces had definitely aligned themselves against Britain as being one of the arch-enemies of Communism but, contrary to expectation, Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel veered from their original make-believe stand and went into a huddle with Lord Mountbatten.

That was the danger sign for the Communists. They realized at long last that Nehru was no social revolutionary. He was fundamentally Harrow, Cambridge and Birla House. The Sardar likewise had no place for revolutionaries in his new portfolio of Home Affairs. He was clapping into jail all forms of revolution—social, political and economic.

So at the Communist party rally at Calcutta, in December 1947, the Communists revised their policy towards the Nehru government. At the same time fundamental changes were made in the party personnel. Comrade P. C. Joshi, the veteran, gave way to the younger Comrade B. T. Randive as the party's secretary and the all clear was given to Indian Communism openly to attack Congress administrations everywhere.

The result of this change of policy was repression at the hands of the government of India, which decided the Communists to go underground and prepare for their revolution. Two or three areas were selected by them as the best experimental ground for this revolution. These areas appeared to be: (1) West Bengal, where the proximity of the East Bengal border gave the operators a chance of escaping to

Pakistan; (2) Malabar, south India, always a fertile spot for revolution; and (3) Telengana.

The setting of Telengana was ideally suited for enlisting peasant support for Communism. There the peasantry had been so long oppressed that they were now ready to follow anyone who would lead them to revolt. Already they had been groomed, as peasants all over India were during the quarter-century of the civil disobedience movements, to revolt against authority.

There were earlier efforts sponsored ironically by the Hyderabad State Congress, but the Nizam, with the help of the British, had put them down.

The control of these peasants now fell into the hands of Communist elements, which had infiltrated from the stronghold of Andhra across the Hyderabad border. The Communists did a more thorough job of organizing the revolt. They formed *dalams* (battalions) of a people's army and supplied them with stolen arms with which they were urged to fight the police, kill the landlords and generally disrupt all the forces of authority.

"Land To The Tiller" was their slogan, and the organization which the Communists set up made a point of redistributing the land to the peasants. The idea was something like that which was put into effect in Eastern Poland in 1939-40 when the Russians occupied it at the outset of the war.

The revolt was so successful that Communist rule prevailed over hundreds of villages in Telengana. According to the Communist claim, they controlled 4,000 villages.

Romesh Thapar, in the same pamphlet,[1] gives his version of Telengana, which I reproduce with the caution that Romesh Thapar, despite his pronounced leftist tendencies, has disclaimed—as did the Communists—that Telengana was Communist inspired. This account of his, therefore, can be read as a Communist version of Telengana. Thapar said:

". . . And then, one day early in 1948, came the greatest news of all: two thousand villages of Telengana, with a population of over four million, had eliminated the rule of the Nizam and had set up a parallel administration. Over

[1] *Storm Over Hyderabad,* publ. Kutub.

an area of 13,000 square miles, where formerly mighty landlords owning anything from 500 to 120,000 acres used to rob the peasants by legal and illegal levies such as cash rent and gram rent, the evils of yesterday had been abolished by the People's Independent Committees. Village officialdom has been liquidated. Panchayats, elected on the basis of adult franchise, are being formed. People's tribunals have been established to deal with all culprits. In short, a new economic and political programme has been fashioned and is now being put into operation.

"This programme, sponsored by the Andhra Mahasabha, is being carried out by the village governments and contains the following measures: All land belonging to traitors who have helped the Nizam to crush the people's movement is being taken possession of and is being distributed among the victims of the atrocities and among poor peasants; all land belonging to the peasants which was forcibly seized by rich peasants and *deshmukhs* is now being taken back by the peasants—half of this land is being given to the original owners, a quarter to the present tiller, and a quarter to the tiller who cultivated it before the present tiller; duly elected People's Committees are being authorized to take possession of and to distribute land which was owned and self-cultivated by rich landlords and *deshmukhs*, while fallow and other lands are being distributed among agricultural labourers and being brought under cultivation; all the grain hoarded by the big landlords, while the peasants were being starved, is being confiscated and distributed among the poorer sections of the peasantry; all arrears of rent, debt, etc., which amount to Rs. 80 crores for the whole of Hyderabad, have been declared illegal, and the tiller has been established as the sole owner of the land from which he cannot be evicted. This is the Telengana revolt which is being dubbed and dismissed as 'a Communist creation'."

Thapar then went on to ask the pertinent questions: "Is it because of what Telengana means that the Indian government is so anxious to settle with the Nizam?"

And my answer is "Yes".

Thapar asks: "Are the rulers of India afraid that their own peasantry might emulate the example of Telengana?"

And my answer again is "Yes".

Thapar asks at the end of this line of questions: "Are the Communists the villains of the piece?"

And my answer is still "Yes".

Telengana would have no meaning if it had not been Communist-inspired.

More than by the revolt itself, the Congress party was perturbed by the fact that the Hyderabad State Congress, which was the Indian National Congress party's preserve, had become honeycombed with Congressmen who were now Communist sympathizers. The local party chief, who was a *sanyasi* (holy man), appeared to have developed strong Communist leanings. It was frightening for the Congress to find that orthodox holy men were turning towards Communism.

With the re-entry into Hyderabad of the Indian army, the pace of that revolt was checked, but even to-day the Communists' hold over Telengana is not completely liquidated. The Indian Military Governor of Hyderabad, Maj.-General Chowdhry, admitted quite recently that lawlessness continues and that murders are still going on.

Had the Communists been allowed to get a firmer footing in Hyderabad state, they would have been in a position to control a very wide belt across the country. In terms of Congress politics it would have meant a complete break in the political line of communication between the north and the south. In time the Congress influence over the south would have waned and the large tracts in south India, inhabited by the Moplahs of Malabar, would in turn have passed into Communist hands.

The "police action" in Hyderabad had, therefore, a deeper meaning than the liquidation of the glamour of a fabulously rich and old-fashioned Indian prince with his antediluvian methods of government, his craze for hoarding his wealth in coffers, his thrifty ways of saving money, his craze for seclusion.

That deeper meaning was to create a fortress in Hyderabad against the growing tide of Communism which was beginning to show signs of rising in those parts of central India of which Hyderabad, because of its geographical position, had become the focal point.

XIV

BEHIND THE KASHMIR STORY

EARLY IN 1948 I did the commentary of a two-reel documentary film entitled *The Kashmir Story*. Produced by a private company, the picture was made under the auspices of the government of India. Shown in India, London and New York, it was the exhibit "A" placed before the U.N. Security Council in our case against Pakistan. My job as commentator was something more than lending my voice to an already prepared script. I was in it from the day the cameramen returned from Kashmir bringing with them disjointed pictures which had to be pieced together into a coherent and connected story.

The Kashmir story was a very simple one. For years the tribes of men on the North-West Frontier of India—in that no-man's-land between Afghanistan and the Indian frontier—have periodically created trouble there. During the days of the British a regular North-West Frontier force had to be stationed in that area in order to keep the tribal raiders in check. It was also a fairly open secret, although exact figures cannot be obtained, that about thirty million rupees a year were spent in the shape of subsidies to various tribal chiefs in return for their goodwill. All this was done very silently and details were known only to the very high-ranking officials of the political department of the government of India.

When India was partitioned, the North-West Frontier went to Pakistan. The subsidies to the tribal chiefs were said to have come to an end partly because the Pakistan exchequer could not afford such an expenditure, and partly also because the Pakistan government believed that these tribesmen, being Moslems, would not attack a Moslem state.

The marauding tribesmen, however, had no such fine sentiments. Free of the control exercised over them, they slipped back into the habits of lawlessness which came naturally to them. Inspired by interested elements, these raiders began one day to find their way into the sun-flushed

valleys of Kashmir. The vandals swooped down upon the once peaceful towns where some 4,000,000 Kashmiris had lived in comparative peace.

In Kashmir itself ruled the weak, pleasure-loving Maharaja, Hari Singh Bahadur. While Kashmir was predominantly a Moslem state, the Maharaja was a Hindu. It was, in fact, a situation in reverse to that of Hyderabad, where a Moslem ruled over a Hindu population.

I know His Highness but slightly. He appears to be a courteous, pleasant-looking Indian ruling prince, fond of racing, fond of throwing parties, fond of good food, fond of Indian singing. I have noticed how, for instance, after a patch of bad luck on the turf he is in the habit of changing his trainer, and then his racing colours, and even the names of his horses, all of which are the characteristics of a temperamental loser. Those who know him better say that he is intolerant, that he demands abject subservience from those who work under or near him and that his least whims have to be obeyed. He is also said to be superstitious, always consulting astrologers.

All this is not unusual in an Indian prince. It is mentioned here merely to throw light on the man around whom the Kashmir affair has turned.

There was at the same time another important figure on the Kashmir scene. His name was Sheikh Abdulla. Abdulla was the symbol of the popular awakening in the state. He voiced the increasing restlessness of the people—a restlessness which was more economic than political. Under Sheikh Abdulla this restlessness was transformed into a crusading force.

Sheikh Abdulla was once only an obscure schoolmaster at the head of a small band of undistinguished intellectuals who met frequently in secret conclave and discussed behind closed doors the economic and political problems of their state. As their convictions grew stronger they decided on various forms of direct action. They began in the usual way by distributing handbills, sticking wall-posters, printing illegal news-sheets. Out of this amateur underground movement grew what was called the Moslem Conference, at first communal in character, aiming at displacing their ruler who was a Hindu.

In 1931 Sheikh Abdulla and some of his party men were flung into prison. Overnight he became a champion of the cause of liberty. Popular demonstrations broke out on his arrest and he was liberated twenty-one days later. But in the meanwhile the obscure schoolmaster had become the Sher-e-Kashmir—the Tiger of Kashmir. His name was a household word; his twenty-one-day jail record had made him a martyr and a hero.

What happened in Kashmir in the early 1930s was only an echo of what was happening all over India, for Mahatma Gandhi was at that time in the thick of his movements of civil disobedience. The unrest had its echo in the Kashmir valley, where the people wanted freedom from the Maharaja's despotic rule. Under it his people had sunk deeper into poverty. Education was at a discount in the state. The people were receding from civilization and were in the grip of bigotry and superstition, while the ruler himself lived in the luxury which only he could afford.

The movement of Sheikh Abdulla was directed against the Maharaja and against the feudal economy which resulted from his way of ruling.

At a certain stage Sheikh Abdulla's movement shed its communal bias and before long it had the blessings and the benediction of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and the Congress party.

His Highness the Maharaja Hari Singh Bahadur of Jammu and Kashmir was not perturbed so long as the British were around to protect him and his *gadi* (throne). Here and there he conceded a point or two and his government put into effect a veneer of political reform, but on the whole things remained much the same. The fight continued between the ruler and Sheikh Abdulla, with the prince always having the upper hand.

After partition, when the British had quit, His Highness found himself confronted with a new situation. It is described by K. Ahmad Abbas in his pamphlet[1] thus:

"October 22nd.—In the hour before dawn, Prithvinath Wanchoo, a young Divisional Engineer, staying in the dak bungalow at Domel near the Kashmir—N.W.F.P. border, is

[1] *Kashmir Fights for Freedom,* publ. Kutub.

rudely awakened by his servant hysterically shouting: '*Dushman aagaya.*'[1] Wanchoo runs bare-footed into the verandah and sees the village of Nalochi, across the Kishenganga bridge, in flames. The Dogra[2] garrison, caught unawares by the suddenness of the invasion, loses its hill-top positions and trenches and falls back to organize a new defensive position."

This savage tribe of raiders which had appeared on the borders of his state were soon pressing inwards towards Srinagar, the capital city.

On the night of October 24th/25th the frightened Maharaja was packing his more treasured belongings into a large fleet of trucks, and by morning his whole entourage had left Srinagar in a convoy of eighty vehicles, reported to be moving south. He was heading for Jammu. When he had reached that safe spot he issued a statement in which he said that he would never leave his people to freebooters ". . . so long as I am ruler of the state and I have life to defend my country!" At the same time he quickly released Sheikh Abdulla, whom he had again imprisoned, and sent an S.O.S. to the Viceroy (Lord Mountbatten) and the government of India for help.

The government of India said that the Indian Union could not constitutionally step in until Kashmir had acceded to the Union. The Maharaja readily did so. At the same time Sheikh Abdulla raised the cry of "Freedom before Accession" and the Indian Union backed this stand. The Maharaja accepted Abdulla's demands. In fact he cut a pathetic picture of an Indian prince, for he seemed willing to give up almost everything to save his title, his *gadi* and his skin.

No one was seriously concerned with the Maharaja from this stage, for he now became a mere figurehead, unwanted but tolerated for the sake of maintaining a constitutional position. He became just a puppet in the hands of the Indian State Ministry who did not want to get rid of him too quickly for that would leave Sheikh Abdulla as undisputed leader of Kashmir, a position for which the Indian government was not prepared.

[1] "The enemy has come."
[2] A tribe (part of the Indian army).

I found that out for myself during the course of working on the commentary of *The Kashmir Story*, for it did not require much intelligence to see how the Indian government were trying to keep the raja in the picture and yet refrain from making any comments for or against him.

From the Indian government's point of view, the Kashmir incident revolved around the Maharaja or Sheikh Abdulla or—this is my opinion—even around issues like democracy and popular government or the freedom of the people of the state. The Indian government's attitude to the *affaire* Kashmir was conditioned by Pakistan's complicity in the activities of the raiders, it being now established that the raiders could not possibly have got to Kashmir without Pakistan's knowledge and sanction. It was clear, after seeing pictures of the transport used by the raiders and the ammunition which they brought with them, that Pakistan was backing the raiding elements with the same enthusiasm with which we were backing the artificial axis of the Maharaja and the Sheikh.

Pakistan went further. It encouraged the setting up of a government in opposition to Sheikh Abdulla's administration and declared that this Pakistan-sponsored "Azad Kashmir government" represented the real "forces of the liberation".

There followed what was virtually a small-scale war which cost both governments large sums of money which neither could afford. In the Indian Parliament, on April 1st, 1949, the Finance Minister asked for supplementary grants, which included Rs. 390,000,000 (i.e. £30,000,000 approx.) to defray the cost of the Kashmir operation and the "police action" in Hyderabad.

The war lasted over a year, even though at the level of the governments no war was declared between the two dominions. The matter reached the Security Council of the United Nations who intervened, though not too successfully. However, as reason prevailed on both governments, a "Cease Fire" was ordered with the object of establishing peaceful conditions in which a referendum could be held which would decide once and for all whether Kashmir would go with Pakistan or come to India.

All these issues, arising out of the internal situation

within the state and out of the fighting between India and Pakistan, were of comparatively lesser importance than the real issue which had become obscured in the pandemonium that prevailed. This main issue revolved, in my opinion, around a question of the utmost international importance, which was whether India should have a common frontier with Russia or not.

The state of Kashmir is bounded by five countries: India, Tibet, China, Russian Turkestan, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This completes the circle from the south through east, north and west. While all the frontiers would have some value, a common frontier with Russia would of necessity have a direct bearing on our future foreign policy. From the Indian Union's point of view, Kashmir was therefore of international importance for, with a neighbour as big as Russia, our policy would assume a completely new aspect. If Kashmir were to become part of India, it would be a compelling reason for India to be friendly with Soviet Russia and our whole foreign policy would have to be shaped on an entirely different footing from that of the neutrality which it now professes to uphold.

The possession or otherwise of Kashmir is, therefore, something more than our concern over the ruler's alleged extravagance or the righteousness of Sheikh Abdulla's cause, or even the welfare of the four million Kashmiris to whom we wished to outstretch our protecting arm. Our very position in the setting of international politics depends on our possession or otherwise of this strategic frontier, which, had Russia not been on that scene, we could have dismissed as a luxury playground, a holiday resort for the rich.

Moreover, it is possible that Russia may have indicated to India that she would prefer to have a common frontier with India rather than with Pakistan. Russia's object would appear to be twofold: one, she would naturally prefer to have as a neighbour a state in which revolutionary forces are already alive rather than a country like Pakistan, which may tend to revert to a form of political lethargy such as exists in most Moslem states in other parts of the world; two, in the event of war with the western world India would be at her doorstep, whether friendly or not, to conquer or to use as became strategically necessary.

This theory is based on the strange coincidence that just prior to our troops entering Kashmir India made a very deliberate gesture of goodwill to Soviet Russia. The scene of that gesture was the Security Council on which a seat had fallen vacant and there were two countries contesting it—the Ukraine and India. In spite of several ballots the issue remained undecided, as the necessary majority could not be secured by either country. At some stage of that contest, India had declared that she would take her fight for the seat to the ultimate conclusion. We would, so our spokesman declared, in no circumstances withdraw.

Suddenly, without any reason being given, just a short while before we stepped into Kashmir India withdrew from the contest in favour of the Ukraine. The speculation was that this was a concession to Russian feelings in response to some undisclosed gesture by Russia, and it was possible that that gesture had something to do with a possible common frontier between the two countries.

Kashmir has also a very vital bearing on the future of the two dominions. When the June 3rd declaration was made, two large areas—that of the province of the North-West Frontier and the little area of Sylhet—were not apportioned to either of the dominions. Their fate was to be decided by a plebiscite. In both places the population was predominantly Moslem, but the administration of those areas and the influence over them was equally predominantly that of the Indian Congress. Moslems may have been in the administration, and in fact they were, but these were Moslems of the Congress variety whom the Congress called nationalist Moslems and whom Jinnah regarded as quislings.

Both these plebiscites went in favour of Pakistan.

Kashmir, therefore, remains the last political battleground between the old Moslem League, now synonymous with Pakistan, and the Congress, now synonymous with India. The population of Kashmir is predominantly Moslem and, though it was led by a popular Moslem leader, his sympathies are with India and the Congress rather than with Pakistan and the Moslem League. The plebiscite will, therefore, decide the last of the "Congress *v.* Moslem League" matches. Although the Congress has already lost

two, its political prestige would be enhanced if Kashmir would vote for accession to India.

It is natural that if the theory on which India was partitioned, namely that Moslem areas should go to Pakistan, has any validity, Kashmir naturally belongs to Pakistan. But if Kashmir refuses to go that way, then that whole theory falls to the ground and the political pandits of the Congress will have succeeded in breaking up the very basis of the theory on which Pakistan was founded. So that while India can survive the loss of Kashmir, Pakistan cannot.

A shrewd political observer, Sarat Chandra Bose, a Hindu, believes that Kashmir will decide to go to Pakistan; a Moslem journalist, K. Ahmad Abbas,[1] formerly my colleague on the *Bombay Chronicle* and now closely allied to Sheikh Abdulla's administration, feels equally confident that Kashmir will come to India.

It is, therefore, somewhat difficult to predict the outcome of the plebiscite.

Both governments have, however, consented to abide by the verdict of the people as recorded by a fair and impartial plebiscite, even if it means the partition of the state.

The powerfully built "Tiger of Kashmir"—the domineering Sheikh Abdulla who is loved by his people—lost no time in touring the country even when the snow lay thick in the valleys. To the people of the villages, which were once sacked and pillaged by the raiders, he has uttered the warning: "If your voting goes wrong it will not only be you who will suffer but your children as well, for if we lose in the voting the armies will not be able to help any more."

The Sheikh's words are like strong wine in the cold and the snow. The verdict for India will largely depend on:

> Whether Sheikh Abdulla really has that tremendous following which has been attributed to him, whether he is the real and undisputed leader of Kashmir or just a pawn of the States Ministry of the government of India, whether he can hold a Moslem-populated Kashmir without the aid of those Indian troops who are policing the

[1] From whose pamphlet *Kashmir Fights for Freedom* I have earlier quoted.

area, and whether his personality and eloquence can win over for us those Moslems against the appeals of their co-religionists from the Islamic state of Pakistan.

Not until the result of the plebiscite is known will any one be in a position to value the true worth of Sheikh Abdulla.

Equally confident of holding at least that part of Kashmir which he now has is the Azad Kashmir leader, Sirdar Ibrahim Khan, who, though not so impassioned as Sheikh Abdulla, has also the power to sway the Moslems of Kashmir to the brotherhood of Islam.

The whole issue of Kashmir is clouded by an emotional element, namely that India's Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, has his ancestral roots in Kashmir. Therefore Jawaharlal Nehru is unable to look upon the Kashmir issue dispassionately. Whatever strategic values Kashmir may or may not have, we are now so far committed in the incident that the honour of India is as much affected as were, originally, the personal feelings of Jawaharlal Nehru.

Too much of the Indian taxpayers' money has gone into "operation Kashmir"; too many of our gallant young men have paid with their lives.

India, therefore, anxiously awaits the verdict of the people of Kashmir.

In the meantime, after the first fourteen months of precarious living in the shadow of war, the common people of Kashmir were able to find heart again and return to their village homes to pick up the broken threads of their war-wrecked lives.

XV

NOTHING TO FEAR

WALTER LIPPMAN, RECOGNIZED EXPERT on foreign policy, once said: "The fundamental subject of foreign policy is how a nation stands in relation to the principal military powers. . . . Every state whether it is bent on aggression or on pacification can achieve its purpose only if it avoids being isolated by a combination of other great states."

The foreign policy of India, if there be any foreign policy at all, appears to have discarded some of these tested and cardinal maxims on which the foreign policies of other great nations have been based.

Three weeks after his assumption of office under Lord Mountbatten's Viceroyalty in 1946 as India's Minister for External Affairs, Pandit Nehru had already declared that "India would follow an independent line of action at all international conferences." The implication was that free India, newly disentangled from the British, owed allegiance to no world power or combination of powers, ententes or blocs. India thus launched out into international affairs without any enemies. The pronouncement was applauded as vague pronouncements on foreign policy usually are.

But three years after the enunciation of this policy India's foreign policy scoreboard showed quite a few enemies and no great friends to speak of. On the international stage she stood alone, still hugging the illusion that she could live in splendid isolation as envisaged by Pandit Nehru.

Those who are in a position to study the shaping of our foreign policy at close quarters indicate three important stages through which this policy has passed and been filtered until it has finally emerged in its present nebulous form. One of these foreign policy experts caustically described the three stages thus:

1. The stage of talk.
2. The stage of emotional conferences.
3. The stage of dilemma.

It is now being whispered at high level, among those who only talk in hush-hush tones, that the government of India appears to have veered round to the idea that at some future date, which they cannot pinpoint with precision, a conflict between Soviet Russia and the Americans or the Anglo-Americans is bound to arise. Such a conflict would obviously involve the use of the atom bomb and all other new devices of modern warfare which have been discovered by scientists and bacteriologists since the signing of the armistice in May 1945. Problem Number One for the government of India has, therefore, been to find a way by which India can stay out of such a conflict.

India is placed on the world map in such a strategic position that even the most optimistic pacifists have to concede that it cannot be overlooked by the conflicting powers.

Looked at in its Asian setting, India appears too close to those countries over which the Red Star of the Kremlin has cast its flickering light. Beginning with the handful of Communists who were opposing the then secure and well-established government of Chiang Kai-Shek, the Communist grip over Asia has spread its tentacles to other countries in south Asia.

The war gave Soviet Russia a sort of respectability in international politics which she did not have before. Men like Mr. Churchill, arch-apostles of the capitalist system, spoke highly of their Soviet allies even though they made strange bedfellows for the ruling classes of Great Britain and Wall-Streeters of America. Russia became one of the big three; Stalin became Uncle Joe, a sort of near relation to Uncle Sam; Stalingrad became an epic like Dunkirk. In the hour of crisis the free peoples of the democracies spoke more freely and generously than they otherwise would have done.

All this had a strange effect on the people of Asia, who took in the things they heard in praise of the Russians, whom they did not know, but discounted the glowing tales of the exploits of the democracies, whom they knew, as being only so much imperialist propaganda. Moreover, no enthusiastic comments on the deeds of the democracies came from Moscow.

In other words, it was the democracies who did all the

propaganda for Soviet Russia which Asia lapped up. They did it so well that it has even outlived its wartime purpose and outlived also the enthusiasm of Mr. Churchill and the men who once made those comments.

Now, when the propagandists of imperialism left the Asian scene because their presence thereon had hindered the freedom of the Asiatic people, they left behind the memory of those glowing accounts of the Soviets. The Soviet agent who now appeared in south Asia therefore came with the recommendation of the democratic powers. He now entered without let or hindrance the territories hitherto guarded by the imperialistic powers. At the same time the door was being left open for the Communist idea to enter the minds of the Asiatic people who for the first time had been left to think for themselves.

All this, happening concurrently with the general world unrest, made an ideal setting in which Communism could successfully operate.

Whereas in the west the countries of Europe had their revolutions one after the other, in the Asiatic countries all the forces of revolt came to the surface at the same time, synchronizing their appearance with the shaking off of shackles of colonial servitude which these countries had known for so long.

Nearest to India there was Burma, in which Thakin Than Tun, the Burmese Communist leader, had unleashed his red hordes in order to overthrow the government. Upper Burma became an open playground for the Communists and the Marxian philosophy seeped through its impenetrable teak forests from the neighbouring country of China. To the dormant Burmese mind the Marxian philosophy of equality, the rule of the proletariat, and, above all, the promise of equal distribution of food and luxuries, made a direct appeal. Red literature was easy to buy in Burma and Communism consequently reached the Burmese, who had longstanding grievances against the British and south Indian Chettyar exploitation.

Moreover the former Premier of Burma, Thakin Nu, in an utterance he made before he was scheduled to quit office, had promised his people that he would build an economic structure on Marxian lines with the active co-operation of

the comrades from the Kremlin. It was the sort of vague utterance Pandit Nehru frequently makes about establishing a Socialist economy in India, even though his party is wedded to the capitalist system, just because this sort of utterance gets good applause.

But as Ed Snow observed in an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* (May 29th, 1948): "Whereas in India the Nehru-Patel cabinet is weighed in favour of big business, in Burma all the new ministers represent farmers, workers or patriotic mass organizations or they are intellectuals under the hegemony of the Socialist party."

Thakin Nu's promises, therefore, added impetus to the Communist Thakin Than Tun's revolutionary ventures. It was U Tin Tut, chief of Burma's new auxiliary force—the last link of friendship between Burma and Britain—who paid with his life for being on a revolutionary scene with milder theories of political economy.

Further south, in Malaya, British and Gurkha troops had to police the Straits, for Communist forces were skirmishing there with the forces of the government. Most of these Communist insurgents were said to be Chinese from Yenan and Manchuria.

Between Burma and the Malayan peninsula came Siam, whose economy was a see-saw movement controlled by the British and the Americans.

Hitherto dominated exclusively by the British, Siam now became more acquainted with the U.S. commercial traveller who, with his tropical suiting and his loud hand-painted necktie, was to be seen in the fashionable quarter of Bangkok dancing with Siamese society girls, some of them "Their Serene or Royal Highnesses", descendants of the old polygamous Kings of Siam.

It was on this scene, unimportant politically one would have thought, that the Soviets put up an outsize embassy. Bangkok was to be the springboard into Burma, the training ground for Soviet diplomats who were tipped for service in the south-east and presumably later in India. With rice as her main export, with an abundance of rubber, tin, teak, kapok, shellac and precious stones, it was understandable that both Moscow and the Chinese Communists were keen on sovietizing Siam.

Further south from Malaya lay the islands of Indonesia, where the republicans appeared to be putting up a fight on two fronts. They were fighting on the one hand against their former imperialist masters, the Dutch, on the other against the Indonesian Reds, headed by Muso on remote-control from the Kremlin. The Dutch are said to have foolishly allowed the Communist unrest to grow with a view to justifying their return to power. The Soviets, on the other hand, appear to have counted on a civil war in Indonesia as part of their long-range plan to sovietize south-east Asia.

Such is the Asian setting adjoining the Indian sub-continent. To date, the iron curtain has not yet dropped on these danger spots of Asia, but if the China of Mao Tze-Tung were to form an axis with Soviet Russia, as Japan did with Hitler's Germany, it would appear difficult for India to remain neutral and unconcerned about the danger of infiltration of Marxian philosophy into India itself.

Mr. K. C. Peter, a not-too-well-known professor of economics in south India, explained to me how this Asian uprising, this raising of the hammer and sickle against established authority, took place at the same time as the colonial empires were yielding to the demands for social and political emancipation and for economic freedom.

In January 1949 Professor Peter wrote to me: "The peasants cried for lands for cultivation, and for cottage industries which would give them subsidiary employment. The workers wanted less hours of labour, more hours of leisure, and more money with which to enjoy that leisure."

The professor was of the opinion that this was an ideal setting for Communism. The Communists, therefore, went all out to make capital of the social and economic grievances of the oppressed people of Asia in order to further their aims. "No doubt," Professor Peter said, "Moscow is behind every move."

We had all been watching the happenings in the Far East with close attention for quite some time. We had watched and written much about the unrest in various Asiatic countries, chiefly those on the Malayan peninsula,

Indonesia and Burma. Unfortunately the news of these revolts and upheavals in Asia was being so slanted that to the casual reader the important thing appeared to be that the English, the French and the Dutch were again angling for strategic positions and colonial markets in these regions of Asia. Occasionally there was mention made of Communists having appeared on the scene, but as usual we paid little attention to these incidental details which obtruded in the news. The general impression in every newspaper in India and in the mind of every government official was that Russia was too busy fighting her battles at the U.N., too busy precipitating the Berlin crisis and too busy drilling and regimenting her newly acquired territories in the west to have time to bother about spreading her sphere of influence over the countries of Asia. While these isolated news items and these occasional doubts did make some of us think, it was, in my case, not until I read what Professor Peter had to say that I realized how closely woven was the Communist plan to convert the people of Asia.

Professor Peter said: "Reliable sources report the existence of an eastern counterpart of the Cominform in the west." Behind the smoke-screen of youth conferences and party conventions it became apparent to the authorities too late that all the most important Communists of south-east Asia had met at "cultural levels" in the February and March of 1948. Peter believed that a Cominform of the east had, as a result of these meetings, taken shape. He said: "After this the Communist party's policy in India and other Far Eastern countries took a sudden turn. The Indian Communists unfurled the flag of rebellion. They took up cudgels against the Nehru government. Restlessness became rampant both in Malaya and Siam. The Burmese Communists were on the alert. No longer is it mysterious why the Soviet embassies in New Delhi, Bangkok and Rangoon have requested fresh additions to their personnel. Everywhere in the east, Communist propaganda is exploiting the various national independence movements."

It was about this time that news came from Nanking that the end was nearing for that monotonous and long-drawn-out civil war between the Chinese Reds and the authoritarian government of Chiang Kai-Shek. Even President

Truman had realized that helping Chiang at this stage would be "throwing dollars down a bottomless abyss". Soon the Generalissimo was in exile.

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My mind went back to April 1942 when, on a drab morning, I had sat in the back of a ramshackle car between two silent Chinese who were escorting me stealthily out of Chungking to an out-of-town hideout of the Eighth Route Red Army. The silence was forced upon us because my two escorts spoke no English, but it accentuated the thrill I felt at the time. Those were the days when this handful of Reds who hung around China's wartime capital were marked men—marked and constantly watched by Tai Lee, the mystery man of Chungking, who was never seen and never heard and always spoken of in whispers, except by the foreign correspondents who delighted in calling him Himmler *Shi Shi.*

So we dodged Tai Lee's men until we reached the open road. I was not sure at the time whether all these precautions were necessary, for I was made to sit low in the car, my hat drawn to cover my face, the lapels of my overcoat turned up, like a character from the underworld. But those Chinese Reds were in dead earnest about hiding my identity from the watchful eyes of Tai Lee's men. I thought at first that these Reds were only yellow, for they seemed frightened of anyone seeing any move they made. Later I discovered that their fright was not physical, nor were they cowards; they were just afraid of being frustrated in carrying out what they had set out to do.

In this way we reached the mountain hut which was the H.Q. of the Red Army general, Chow En-Lai, with whom I was to spend the day. Chow was one of the triumvirate who had led the Red revolt. Of that trio Mao Tze-Tung was the overall chief, handling both policy and the direction of the war; Chu Teh was operational commander-in-chief, the actual battlefield general; and Chow En-Lai was entrusted with the delicate assignment of being the Communist representative at the court of Chiang Kai-Shek.

Chow explained to me the background of the Communist revolt. Whether it was true or not, he seemed anxious to

impress upon me how the Communism of the Chinese Reds was of a different variety, though not different in principles, from the Communism of Soviet Russia. In other words, Chinese Communism was an indigenous movement which sprang from the land and the people, a revolt against the oppression and the tyranny which was peculiar to China; it was not, Chow emphasized more than once, a branch movement which was to bring China within the Kremlin sphere of influence. According to him, China was not going to be a colony of Soviet Russia.

All this was said seven years ago and even now it is possible that Mao Tze-Tung may not allow himself and his country to come under the heel of the men of the Kremlin; but it is too early to tell what final shape Communist China will take in the future.

The more important fact, however, was that even as early as 1942 it was apparent to an impartial observer that the Communist movement in China was slowly but steadily gaining ground in that country. I could see the difference in the determination of these Red Army men, who had very little to call their own, who accepted without murmur the token pay of one worthless Chinese dollar a week and who fought on a two-pronged front—on one front the Japanese, on the other the armies of Chiang—with a grim determination such as only men who are either fanatical or inspired can have.

During the course of that day Chow and his party-men talked on all manner of subjects: labour conditions, defence, leadership, conflicts, trade unions, the war in the north, the Japanese and a dozen other subjects on which they produced an array of facts and figures which was most impressive. They asked me in turn the most searching questions on India, some of which I found difficult to answer with the same degree of authority as when they had spoken of their country.

I noted one thing about Chow En-Lai. He made no vainglorious boast; he did not talk the usual clap-trap about "marching to eventual victory", a phrase which so many Kuomintang officials had used. Chow was intensely practical. He knew his party's limitations, his army's vulnerability. He knew how the dice was loaded against the Reds, for

Chiang and his generals had used U.S. Lease-Lend aid against the Chinese Red Army instead of using it against the Japanese, for which purpose that aid was granted. Even so he had a cool confidence that in the end his Red Army would get what aid it wanted from the people, for without the people that army had no meaning and the revolt had no purpose.

That was the theme of the whole Communist movement in China. All the planning which was done had counted on this unknown quantum of help from the land and the people which made it possible for the Red Army to live from day to day, eating when and where it could, sleeping under the open sky or in the fields or wherever the people would let the Red soldiers sleep.

Chow spoke to me of some of the plans they had made and as he spoke I felt the man had nerves of steel to face day by day the powerful bludgeoning which came from General Chiang Kai-Shek and his generals, some of whom had sworn to exterminate every Red from the face of China. Yet when I saw him that day walking across the green mountain-side with his trousers rolled up to avoid the mud, his felt hat curled up with age and his not-so-new valise tucked under his arm, Chow looked to me more like a Chinese commercial traveller than a general of the Eighth Route Army.

When I returned to the Press hostel that evening I could not help feeling the power that was behind this Red movement in China. Ill-equipped though they were, wearing shabby uniforms, these squat little fellows of the Eighth Route Army had nerve, grit and determination. They had one thing more; they had the patience to work according to a long-range plan and the patience to await its fulfilment.

Not many days later Madame Chiang Kai-Shek did me the honour of asking me to tea. The two of us talked to each other for over an hour. The talk, however, was not of trade unions and labour conditions, or of the war and Chinese people, for she was essentially a beautiful woman and had only been pushed by circumstance into the sordid vortex of world politics. So we preferred to talk that day of the beauty that once was life, of a grace of living which was

dying, of good food, good wine, of good-looking men and women. I spoke to her of my loves and sorrows and she in turn told me of the tired look she had seen in the eyes of Jawaharlal Nehru. Before I left Chungking she gave me a beautiful piece of blue-and-white china; and in turn I gave my much treasured bottle of Max Factor's eau de cologne!

Given a choice again between lunch with Chow En-Lai and tea with the beautiful Mayling Soong Chiang, I suppose the man in me would prefer to have the tea-party, but, to a correspondent, Chow, with all the nothing he then had to offer, would be of more lasting value.

A month later in Bombay, at the luncheon table of J. R. D. Tata, Chairman of the billion-dollar Indian industrial combine, I sat opposite Pandit Nehru. I tried that day to indicate to Pandit Nehru in as tactful a manner as I could that the Red Star was likely to be in the ascendant in China while that of Chiang Kai-Shek and the Kuomintang was likely to fall from the skies.

The Pandit was most courteous and listened to every word I said. But I don't think he believed in my judgement for, only a few months before, he had himself met the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang on their visit to India and "our valiant neighbours" had made a deep impression on him.

As I have said, all this happened seven years ago and its relevance now is only to give the background of how the pattern of modern Asia came to change beyond recognition, all within the space of a few years. This Red China which I saw in crude and embryo form was to become the well-dressed window of Communism in the east.

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In this Asian setting, in which "our valiant neighbour" has gone Red, it will be somewhat difficult to maintain that splendid isolation which seems to be the corner-stone of our foreign policy.

To preserve neutrality in times of peace is probably possible, countries generally respect international law and convention in the comparatively calm atmosphere of an international conference table. In the debates of the U.N.

all that our representative needs is a directive from the government at home chalking out the position he should maintain in the division lobby. He could be told in an ordinary cable message what resolutions he is to support, what to oppose and when to remain neutral. In normal practice representatives and delegates are generally briefed by their governments and it would appear to be easy for us to toe the line of neutrality on the many occasions on which, at the U.N., Russia and her satellites come into open conflict with the Anglo-American bloc.

But when war is declared, a new element appears which is often not within the calculation of individual governments. In a battle for survival, a nation often feels itself justified, rightly or wrongly, in discarding the canons of law and in discarding those conventions of war which may have been agreed upon in the calmer atmosphere of peace.

It then falls upon a government or a country to endeavour to maintain whatever position it wishes to maintain, whether it is a position of defence or of aggression or of neutrality, by the strength of its own forces, moral and material. In other words, as Sarat Chandra Bose put it: "If India wants neutrality she should be *ready for neutrality.*" To be ready for neutrality, Bose suggested extensive military preparations and an alliance between India, Pakistan, Nepal and Burma. He called this alliance "U.N.-South", the United Nations of south Asia. He envisaged an extension of this alliance into an ultimate pan-Asian federation.

But Bose's idea of federation presupposed a capacity for defence which none of the five countries he mentioned appears to have. So that, side by side with such a federation, it seems imperative that the countries which comprise such an alliance should each and all together be a great industrial power. Moreover, the sort of industrial development contemplated must be something more than having a handful of cloth mills and a steel plant at Jamshetpur—all of which is euphemistically referred to in India as industrial development. The industrial power required in times of war is of a very different kind. The east is backward in this form of industry; it is in fact almost entirely dependent on

the west and on America for such things as heavy machinery and heavy industries.

Of the five countries which Bose enumerated in the "U.N.-South" alliance, India is perhaps the most progressive, the most industrialized and the most resourceful. Yet no intelligent Indian can deceive himself that his country is to-day a great industrial power. India cannot as yet manufacture a complete motor car or an aeroplane, let alone a modern tank or a battleship or an atom bomb. Such means of heavy defence of which our navy, army and air force can boast are entirely imported from Europe or America. In view of this, it would still be foolish to suppose that in the event of war we could defend our vast coastline with HMIS *Delhi,* the only battleship we have, and a varied assortment of Royal Indian Navy destroyers and sloops. Therefore before framing a foreign policy we had to realize our limitations.

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In August 1947 General Viscount Montgomery laid down five essential requisites for the security of a nation. They were:

(1) a strong national character;
(2) a great development of scientific and industrial research;
(3) a powerful and well-disciplined industrial power;
(4) a regular army;
(5) preparedness.

Montgomery was obviously speaking in terms of Great Britain, who already had the added requisite of an alliance with other powers including the all-powerful U.S. Moreover, Britain was a founder member of the Anglo-American bloc whose members were tacitly pledged to rush to each other's aid in the event of Russian aggression.

Out of the five essentials he mentioned, India has got only one—a regular army—with this difference, that our army is not self-sufficient and has largely to depend for its armaments and materials on countries abroad. If India in the next war is to depend upon its army for the defence of

its neutrality, it would seem highly improbable that either of the two opposing blocs of world war III would part with even a fraction of its armament manufacture just to help India remain neutral. Nor has India any assets of particular value in wartime with which to bargain for these necessary armaments. The only assets we have are our wide open spaces, which might make strategic bases for one bloc or the other, but in that case the illusion of neutrality would have to end.

To many Congressmen in India such things as bases and battleships are apparently not important. With truth and non-violence they had got rid of the British, and Mahatma Gandhi had told them that with this *swadeshi* brand of moral rearmament they could have defended themselves even against Japanese. So with truth and non-violence painted on one sail, neutrality on the other, and the Indian national flag fluttering from the mast, they were now ready to sail the perilous seas of world war III, steering clear of the big battleships and submarines of other powers.

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The two years of our independence, dedicated to pursuing this policy of neutrality, have resulted in a marked deterioration in our foreign affairs. The warmth with which the U.S. first welcomed the newly-liberated India into the community of the free peoples of the world cooled down when our representatives to the U.N. made it abundantly clear by their behaviour in public that they preferred the company of the Russians to that of the British and American statesmen. The U.S. diplomats were always courteous but they made their mental notes.

There were a number of other incidents, small in themselves, which did not help our Anglo-American relations. For instance, when Mr. Rajgopalachari became Governor-General in the place of Lord Louis Mountbatten, the first diplomatic representative he invited to tea, against all accepted rules of seniority and precedent, was the Soviet Ambassador. The Americans could not possibly have liked this out-of-turn attention being paid to the Soviets at such a high state level. Likewise, I have reason to believe from my own sources of information that the U.S. State Depart-

ment took a very dim view of our embassy at Washington being left, so early in its life as after Mr. Asaf Ali's return, in the charge of an absurdly junior officer, Mr. R. K. Nehru, while the U.S. had accorded us the courtesy of sending to New Delhi a man of the standing of Dr. Henry F. Grady. It may have been only a coincidence but Dr. Grady's transfer to Greece soon followed, and only after Sir Benegal Rama Rao arrived in Washington did the U.S. State Department nominate Mr. Loy Henderson as their next ambassador to India.

This brusque retort at diplomatic level quickly brought home to the Indian leaders that, while they may be unconventional and unorthodox in their manners at home, in the pattern of world diplomacy it would be as well to conform to the accepted form of diplomatic etiquette.

With the British it was difficult, for obvious reasons, to have too cordial a relationship, because there was still a large section of public opinion in India which remained antagonistic to Britain and the British. On the surface, however, and at the government level, the relationship has always been cordial. Indian personnel continue to be trained in Britain, Indian stores and ships are purchased from Britain, and in many ways the two countries still seem to have much in common and have much to sort out.

In our relationship with Russia the Soviets could not be accused of taking the initiative in cooling off. The first signs came from us, who, after having thrown ourselves into the arms of their leaders, representatives and delegates during the initial stages of our experiments in diplomacy, now fought shy of being too tightly entangled in the Communist embrace.

In return for our obvious partisanship of the U.S.S.R., the Soviets had supported us on the South African issue at the U.N. Again they supported us when we launched our complaint against the Dutch over Indonesia. Even at the ECAFE it was the U.S.S.R. which alone among the great powers wholeheartedly advocated and supported the industrialization of Asia.

In the first flush of independence we had rather enjoyed the prospect of being free to flirt with the Soviets, a thrill

which had been denied to us while the British controlled our foreign policy. But we soon found that a too friendly attitude to Communist Russia had its disadvantages. While in theory our "revolutionary" Congress leaders should have had a sympathetic fellow-feeling for the revolutionary Russians, in practice it was found that our leaders were, after all, capitalists at heart who lived in mortal fear of Communism which would deprive them of all they had. A growing tendency became discernible in India of avoiding everything Communist and therefore everything Russian.

The home policy of India at this stage, far from being conciliatory to Soviet Russia, suddenly turned violently anti-Communist. Emergency legislation intended for use on the communal issue was soon brought into play against the Communists. Soviet Russia could now have no illusions left about any material results developing from those early advances made by our jejune diplomats at the early U.N. conferences and at Moscow.

But even as Russia had held her enthusiasm in check when we had foisted our attentions on her, so she gave no indication of being affected by our drawing back.

In addition to the big three whom we had alienated we had also, either because of our foreign policy or by force of circumstances, rubbed a number of other countries up the wrong way.

Halfway to Europe lay the Middle East, where a bitter conflict raged over Palestine. Even before we found our feet at the U.N. our delegates had begun to take sides on the issue. Much could be said on both sides of this problem, which was by no means clear cut, but the temptation to perform on the U.N. platform was too strong for our delegates, who straightaway entered the controversy and virtually committed India to the Arabs.

But, in spite of this strong anti-Jewish line which we adopted, while we alienated the Jews we did not succeed in cementing any deep friendship with the Arab races. The Arabs naturally found a common cause in a common religion which bound them closer to Pakistan than to India and we had no Arab support on an issue like Kashmir, on which we had strong differences with Pakistan. In the end,

therefore, we had neither Jew nor Arab friendship upon which to count.

Circumstances had forced our government to take an attitude towards South Africa which entangled us in yet another controversy. Our policy towards South Africa was a vindication of the rights of man and there could be no two opinions in this country that our government's policy towards South Africa was right. Even so, through no fault of our government, we had crossed swords with yet another country without having the compensation of having improved the status of our nationals abroad.

India had soon to look elsewhere for international friends. Disappointed with the leading powers of the West and the Middle East, and unable to afford to toe the Communist line, India decided to play a new role in international affairs. She was to become the champion of the smaller units of colonial people in Asia.

Early in his career, Pandit Nehru rallied around the Indian capital the representatives of various Asian countries with a view to solidifying these newly-awakened regions of Asia. At first the accent was on the cultural bonds and the common heritage of our civilizations, and the conferences ended up in an orgy of mutually congratulatory speeches followed by tea-parties and receptions. But clearly discernible behind all these early cultural reunions, held in the wake of the departed imperialists, was a wish to form a united Asian bloc, strong enough to hold a position of neutrality between the Soviets and the Anglo-Americans in the event of another world conflagration.

Pandit Nehru had, however, omitted to take into his calculations two important factors; one was that the Asiatic elements, which so readily rallied around him, were but a minor portion of the whole continent. They did not include Japan, which was almost totally under U.S. control, Red China, which was soon to overlap China itself, or that part of Russia which was in Asia.

The second factor was that if India did succeed in creating this south Asian bloc, or, as Sarat Chandra Bose had called it, "U.N.-South", its importance could only be felt at conferences. It was completely useless as a defensive military factor in the event of war and its professed neutrality would

always be at the mercy of the military powers who needed bases.

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In October 1948, when Pandit Nehru appeared in London for the Dominion Premiers' Conference and in Paris for the meetings of the U.N., he received a tremendous ovation from the people of the countries of Europe which he visited and from all the world's statesmen. These ovations were strictly personal to him; he had been a fighter for his country's freedom; he was an exponent of the democratic idea; he was a writer whose books had enriched the mind and thought of freedom-loving people all over the world; he was a handsome aristocrat, born of rich parents, who could have had all the luxuries of the world but preferred to suffer privations in jail in the cause of freedom.

Unfortunately, the tendency too often was to interpret the applause he received for what he had done as applause for what he was now doing. Weighed down by an inferiority complex which the British domination had left in its trail, little Indian hearts were glad at such recognition as was given by the outside world to those of their leaders who but a few years ago were pushed around by the British. While this was quite understandable in view of the old circumstances in which, within a quarter of a century, our people had succeeded in becoming free men, it warped our perspective and our ability to judge the correctness of the lead that was now being given to us. The years of servitude had made the Indian afraid to think for himself and he instinctively looked up to his erstwhile rulers and others who dominated the world scene to decide whether the foreign policy of his government and the utterances of his representatives were making the right sort of impression abroad. So that we ignored the direct results of our MAKE-NO-FRIENDS policy and concentrated only on the enthusiasm with which Nehru as an individual was being greeted in the capitals of the west. We had yet to learn the lessons which the British learnt at Munich when the thundering applause that greeted Mr. Chamberlain, both in Germany and in Britain, obscured the hard fact that the man who went on a mission of peace had in reality only shelved his problems. In a different sense Pandit Nehru was doing the

same thing, for all these Asian Relations Conferences, these attempts to establish a neutral Asian bloc, these appearances in London and Paris, had still not solved the country's problem, which was to have a foreign policy which would ensure the defence of our country in the event of a world conflagration.

Full of enthusiasm, Pandit Nehru alighted from Air India International at the London Airport. There he saw familiar faces in the large crowd which had gathered to receive him. The Indian Press reported all the little details of that trip: how he chatted with his fellow passengers; how he asked the crew many questions about flying; how he studied maps, books, and documents; and how, to the satisfaction of the air hostess, he enjoyed his chicken lunch. We also read how India's Prime Minister and his sister Vijayalakshmi, who was with him in England, went to the country home of the Mountbattens in Hampshire, and how brother and sister rode through Romsey's crowded streets in Mountbatten's jeep.

At Kingsway Hall, in London, some 2,000 British and Indian admirers came to hear Pandit Nehru speak. To them Pandit Nehru declared: "I should like the closest co-operation between the people of India and the people of Britain."

This was the note he struck in Britain, the note which brought many eloquent tributes to his great qualities from men like Harold Laski and Lord Pethick-Lawrence. H.M. the King was said to have been greatly impressed by the Pandit. All that made good Sunday morning reading, but on Pandit Nehru's return from the trip some of his countrymen for the first time became rather dubious about the lead he was giving to the country. On the day he passed through Bombay on his way back from Europe, November 6th, 1948, the *Free Press Journal*, an ardent nationalist paper throughout the years of the struggle, produced an editorial which registered the first intelligent question mark against his leadership.

It read:

"The Prime Minister has returned to India. He has returned bearing on his brow a laurel crown. India is happy

to note that London, Paris and the world Assembly share our love and affection for him.

The fanfare of acclaiming trumpets has been sounded. As its last echoes die down, the Prime Minister returns to the Indian capital to face the greatest test of his scintillating career.

The test arises out of the following contradictory facts: Pandit Nehru stands at the head of a government which is Socialist in theory and Conservative in practice.

He is one of the architects of the draft constitution which proclaims liberty, equality and fraternity in almost the same breath that it qualifies these attributes with safeguards and provisos.

He stands at the head of the nation he has helped to create, to which he has promised sovereign liberty without reservations and ties. He has also promised, according to recent utterances to other than the nation, certain ties which may or may not imply reservations. . . .

. . . According to him, India in Asia will no longer tolerate colonialism and imperialism.

According to him, India will be a sovereign independent republic but this status need not affect the ties with the commonwealth.

India in the commonwealth is a partner in an organization one of whose members owns colonial possessions in Asia. That member is also an ally of two powerful imperialisms which hold millions of Asians in thrall.

India, therefore, despite the Prime Minister's utterances, supports colonialism in Asia and gives support to imperialism in Asia.

If, for external affairs, the Indian President represents the British King, India outside India is not a republic but a monarchical dominion.

Can India be a republic at home and a monarchy abroad?

This then is the test—what is the Prime Minister of India?

Is he India's greatest Socialist, or is he a symbol of compromise?

Is he the idol of the Indian people, cast in one solid mould of gold, or is he a figurehead moulded out of many metals?

. . . Pandit Nehru will have to give a conclusive answer to these questions in the immediate future.

He must tell us, point by point, argument by argument, the need for these painful contortions and gymnastics.

What will accrue to us if we do not press for the implementation of the pledges he has made and which are inherent in our draft constitution?

What will we gain if we throw overboard our principles, our honour and our word by remaining within the folds of an imperialist and colonial system?

Will we get dollars? If so, how many? Will we get capital goods from Britain to aid our economic and industrial regeneration? If so, how soon?

Can we not secure what we need through treaties, alliances and trade pacts? Will the Western Powers deliberately starve us if we do not remain within the Commonwealth, after Britain has clearly stated that we are free to decide the question for ourselves?

What is the actual purpose and policy behind the desire to barter our honour? . . .

. . . The Prime Minister is now a great world figure.

He has climbed the dizzy pinnacles of international fame on the profound belief in men's hearts that he is a man of the people, by the people, for the people, a true, active and successful Socialist, which in these days is an extraordinary phenomenon.

We want to know if the belief in men's hearts is justifiable, to-day. . . ."

It is, therefore, difficult for any intelligent observer to be able to say with any degree of precision what the foreign policy of India was or, if it had not already been formed, what it was aiming at.

If the idea of India remaining in the Commonwealth is to materialize, what is to happen to those Asian countries to whom we were playing godfather? Would they also be allied to the interests of the Commonwealth? It seems a difficult feat for our external affairs department, even with Pandit Nehru at its head and a galaxy of highly paid ambassadors at its disposal, to bring out a foreign policy by which we could become a republic, a member of the Commonwealth and a captain of the Asian bloc all together.

In India, in 1949, it appears difficult to convince Congressmen that in the first place there must be some fundamental principles on which to found a foreign policy, that these principles must be based on reality and our limitations and not on an abstract ideology, that they must take into

account the fact that we are not yet either a military or an industrial power, that we have not, and have no means of getting, the weapons of World War III.

The Congress-dominated government of India, however, ignores all these questions, these doubts, these fears. In true Congress fashion it says: "You have nothing to fear."

XVI

THE MEN AT THE TOP

SINCE THE DEATH OF Mahatma Gandhi there have been two men at the top of Indian politics. They are Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabbhai Patel. Both men belong to the same party, the Congress; both are now in the administration with Pandit Nehru as the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, and Sardar Patel as Deputy Prime Minister, Home Minister and Minister for the States. No two men could be more different in upbringing and education, outlook, ideology or action.

Jawaharlal was born and grew up in Allahabad in the United Provinces. His father was a wealthy lawyer, the silver-tongued Motilal Nehru. Fortune was kind to that Nehru home. The young Jawaharlal had the advantage of an English education. He was schooled at Harrow and polished at Trinity. By the time he returned to India his father had joined Mahatma Gandhi and the position which Motilal held, both in the country and in the Congress, gave Jawaharlal an entry into those high circles without any effort.

In my book, *I've Shed My Tears,*[1] written before freedom came, I described him thus:

". . . Jawaharlal Nehru [was] the idol of the younger man. With his well-chiselled features, he looked more like a Greek god than a Kashmiri Brahmin. . . .

His early contact with the West and its political philosophies left a permanent mark on him and he was more often at home reading large volumes of Sidney and Beatrice Webb than concerned with a spinning-wheel or goat's milk. Jawaharlal was not born of the masses. He was well-read, cultured and facile, a Fabian at heart, an aristocrat by birth. Circumstances had compelled him to mix with the large crowds of dumb, driven people because the struggle for freedom was mixed up with the masses.

Assumption of mass leadership often made him feel un-

[1] Appleton-Century, New York.

comfortable in his surroundings. He was impatient with the mediocrity he found around him. His belief in non-violence only came to him because of his implicit faith in Gandhi, but by instinct he would have preferred to have picked up a gun to fight his battle for freedom. Often, because of his obedience to Gandhi's wishes, he found himself confused by conflicting loyalties.

Jawaharlal boasted of no intuition; no inner voice urged him on. . . . He was a realist aware of the great changes which were taking place in the outside world and of the importance of thinking in broader terms than those of Indian nationalism. But first things had to come first and, as a result, the cause of India took precedence over other causes.

Jawaharlal had a sense of humour which was quick and subtle. The years of struggle, however, had burned the smile off his face. Jawaharlal was often sad and serious. He seemed to want to get somewhere in a great hurry, though no one, perhaps not even he, knew where exactly he wanted to go. Freedom was not the limit of his ambitions.

He had spent more time in prison than out of it. His character was moulded within its bleak and solitary walls. He once said that his was a family of convictions. With all that, he was a dreamer. He should never have been in the Congress, for its orthodox element cramped his style. But, born an Indian in the hour of his country's greatest struggle, and sensitive to the humiliation of being unfree, there seemed no other role for him."

That was the Nehru who, with Mahatma Gandhi, led our fight for freedom. He had his little weaknesses even then. For one thing he was ruled by his emotions rather than by his head. He was easily carried away by the righteousness of a cause, by a crusading spirit and the sad, sad tales of woe which often came to him. He has always been very impressionable, hot-tempered and easily excited. Patience was not one of his qualities. He was too conscious of his superiority over other men; a domineering individual who often refused to see any point of view other than his own. He could be very peevish; he could be impetuous. He knew he could count upon the personal affection which the people had for him to carry him through any opposition.

Progressive movements all over the world fascinated Jawaharlal. He always came back from his trips abroad full

of admiration for the other people of the world who were also fighting their battles of freedom. Likewise, he kept himself in touch with that modern literature which spoke the language of freedom.

Jawaharlal shone in the India of the British not only because of his positive qualities but even more because the people had woven a legend around him. In terms of the Hindu folklore he was likened to a prince fighting for the poor, ready with his sword to defend the unarmed, to slay the oppressor, to guard the rights of man, to fight for human justice.

That was the man who became the first Prime Minister of India.

Sardar Vallabbhai Patel did not have Jawaharlal's background. Vallabbhai's origin was rustic; he was born of peasant parents in the heart of Gujarat. His father is said to have participated in the mutiny of 1857 as a common *sepoy*. Vallabbhai rose to prominence entirely through his own efforts. He had a college education in India and later went to London, where he was called to the Bar from the Middle Temple. Jinnah once said of him: "He knows law well; he knows no equity."

On his return to India the young Patel practised in the courts of Ahmedabad. The story is told of how he had rushed up to Bombay to put his wife into a hospital and rushed back to Ahmedabad to argue a murder case. As he was in the midst of his defence, he received a telegram which said his wife was dead. He read it and put it into his pocket, and went on with his case. Unlike Nehru, he showed no trace of emotion.

From law, Vallabbhai turned to politics. He got drawn under the spell of the Mahatma.

In 1928 he shot out into the forefront when he became the focal point of a peasant revolt in Bardoli. He stood out as a brilliant field worker, indispensable in a political struggle. After Bardoli, he became known as the Sardar, the Chief. "Every home shall be a Congress office, every soul a Congress organization," the Sardar said.

Soon he became the party boss of the Congress. John Gunther likened him to Jim Farley. He was rough, hard as a rock, a matter-of-fact politician who had not time for

polish and refinement. The American magazine *Time* called him leathertough.

I remember hearing Sardar Patel speak many years ago. It was on the occasion of the opening ceremony of Scindia House, the home of Indian shipbuilding. I have never heard so much concentrated bitterness spouting out from the lips of any one man in a single hour. He seemed to say all the things he wanted to say against the British in that one speech. His bitterness was contagious for it grew in me for days and I found it difficult to shake it off. The only appropriate gesture he could have made at the end of that hour of invective and abuse would have been to spit on the floor. But the Sardar merely wiped his lips.

That was the man who was to become Pandit Nehru's second-in-command.

It was but natural that when two men as different in every way as Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel were destined to inherit between them the political leadership of the Congress and the country, the future of that leadership would appear somewhat uncertain.

Mahatma Gandhi, with his keen sense of perception, was not unaware that his two ablest lieutenants were drifting apart. With his uncanny sense of timing he unexpectedly sent for the Sardar one afternoon. For an hour he spoke to him and it is known only to a very few that the talk revolved around that widening gulf. The Mahatma took a promise from Patel that he would never forsake Nehru, whatever their differences. The talk ended and the Mahatma looked at his watch and told the Sardar it was time for his evening prayer. The people were waiting for Gandhiji in the garden of Birla House. So the Sardar left him, and when he reached his bungalow he heard the news that Mahatma Gandhi had been shot.

It is perhaps because of this promise that the political leadership of India to-day is a compromise between personalities and forces which are opposed to each other. Some of these forces are emotional and spring from loyalties, some are political and can be traced to ambitions, some are economic safeguards against elements which preach such heresies as equality of opportunity and redistribution of wealth.

The element of compromise is noticeable in more ways than one, for out of this leadership has come an administration which is democratic in theory but not in practice. Out of it also we have had a political economy which was planned as a Socialist economy in the world-accepted sense of that term, but which in actual practice is attempting to kill the very germ of trade unionism and put an armed guard around the already strong capitalist system, with orders to shoot at sight every ugly Socialist, trade union or Communist head that pops up.

Under this leadership there has come into power a people's government in which the people have had little or no voice whatever. It falls short of a dictatorship because it has not been proclaimed as such. That is the compromise—a compromise between theory and practice.

Under this leadership, princes and feudal lords are being democratized while democrats and social revolutionaries are being remoulded by emergency legislation into despots with arbitrary powers. That too is a compromise.

Under Nehru and Patel India is, therefore, a cultured democracy, not as men are cultured, but as in the language of pearls. There is this little difference. Usually it is the expert eye which can detect that subtle difference between the cultured and the real pearl, a difference which the average man cannot see; but in the case of a cultured democracy it is the ordinary men who can tell the difference but not the expert constitutionalist.

The Pandit Nehru who is the Prime Minister of India is not the same Nehru who once fought in the war for the liberation of our people.

The revolutionary Socialist is no more. The fire in him has died down. His vision is blurred. His courage is gone. Once he thrilled the vast crowds like a dare-devil driver at the wheel of a high-powered racing car, taking dangerous corners and hairpin bends, with the crowds roaring as he straightened out into the straight road. To-day the crowds still applaud, but with warmth of affection rather than out of excitement, as they see him in the back seat of a highly polished limousine driven by a liveried chauffeur down the safe avenues of the capital city. In the old days he had a destination; now he has a status!

Jawaharlal Nehru is still honest. There is no question about his sincerity. But he has abandoned the quest for that greater honesty which once spurred him on. Freedom from the British was to have been only a half-way house to freedom for the Indian. This was the promise he once held out to his people. But at that half-way house he has halted and now seems reluctant to move on. Nevertheless so great is the people's love for him that wherever he goes in his country they come in their hundred thousands to see him. I saw for myself in September 1948, when he spoke on the sands at Chowpatty in Bombay, how the people had gathered to hear him till the shore ran out. His grip over the heart of India is still as firm as ever for he is still the strongest emotional force in the country.

Now and again, when the common people gather round him as in the old days, he is momentarily inspired and says things like: "The Socialist idea is accepted by our nation." (Bombay, September 1948). He calls the capitalists and industrialists cowards; he speaks of his determination to hang every black-marketeer from the nearest tree.

All this is fine oratory and it renews the people's faith in him, but soon the spark which had been rekindled that day is found to be only a flicker of the dying flame. Pandit Nehru expresses his belief in Socialism, and in a planned economy, democracy and freedom; the governments of the Centre and the provinces continue to smother the opposition offered by every progressive and to silence every critic of the Congress régime.

The purge is still on. There is no real change of policy. The so-called emergency continues and so long as the present interpretation of what constitutes an emergency is accepted there seems no likelihood of conditions in India ever becoming normal. Whatever new hope Nehru's speeches may create, the country daily moves further away from the promised land. Instead of the British, the people now face the prospect of having a political ruling class permanently governing the country. The country is moving towards the establishment of a Congress dictatorship. The people never gave the Congress a mandate to do this.

The change that has come over Jawaharlal is perhaps the most disappointing thing that has happened in modern

India. With power, he has become increasingly intolerant of anyone who opposes him in the government, the party or the country at large. Occasionally, when the criticism continues unabated or the opposition hardens—as at a recent Congress party rally—he holds out the unfair threat that he will resign. Then, like a group of hysterical women, his political critics go into a huddle and everyone tries to pacify everyone else and the opposition is withdrawn amidst cries of "jai Hind" and "Jawaharlal ki jai". It is, therefore, difficult for anyone to have any independent thought or opinion and be regarded as his friend.

Because of this change which has come over him, Jawaharlal has shattered the faith of many a young man whose mind he himself had moulded with the concept of democracy and freedom which he once held. Judged by his own standards it is difficult for any intelligent Indian to overlook the stifling of democratic ideas which is taking place under his government. On to the strong new roots of freedom he has been apologetically grafting the dead but familiar branches of police *raj*, which it had taken our people over twenty-five years to destroy.

What about Sardar Patel?

The Sardar gave no cause for disillusionment, for the part he had played in the national movement had been essentially that of an organizer rather than that of an idealist. His job had always been to get things done and it never worried him how he did it. He was a man of strong likes and dislikes, a man with a will of his own. He never found it necessary to seek advice for he had ample faith in his own judgement and in his ability to decide what was best to do. On matters with which he was not familiar he listened patiently to what others had to say; then he made up his own mind and went ahead. He never cared what others thought of the methods he used to achieve his objective, so long as he believed that the objective had to be reached. If he was proved wrong, he was willing to admit an error of judgement. He even altered his course, but only with a view to reaching that same objective.

The Sardar was no stickler for high morality. His principles were not those of an idealist. He was hard, matter-of-fact and ruthless. In his India the meek would never

inherit the earth: they would only have what he thought was best for them.

Pandit Nehru promised much and gave little; Sardar Patel promised nothing and gave nothing.

One of the best known men in Indian industry, on his return from high level conferences in New Delhi, summed up the difference between Nehru and Patel thus: "As an industrialist and a capitalist, I know where I stand with Sardar Patel. He is no friend of mine. With Pandit Nehru, in whose honesty I have infinite trust, I never know from day to day where I am."

These are the two men at the top of the leadership of our country. Time and again they have proclaimed that the best possible co-operation has existed between them and that any suggestion of their drifting apart was purely malicious.

It became difficult, however, to accept this oft-repeated assurance of teamwork in the face of so much evidence to the contrary. Political observers could not understand why, with the co-operation and the understanding which was said to exist between them, there was no corresponding uniformity of policy in their public utterances.

For instance, when Pandit Nehru was in London trying to find a peaceful solution with Pakistan's Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, around the dinner table of Mr. Attlee, the Sardar was in India dishing out a handful of aggressive utterances on Pakistan which could hardly be construed as conciliatory or conducive to peace between the two dominions. They were, in fact, in the nature of a warning. A sample of his ill-chosen words on that occasion read as follows: "We warned them not to intervene in our domestic matters like thieves and dacoits, but they did not heed us. . . . Pakistan is indulging in talks of friendship, neighbourliness and affection. But all this talk is meaningless. . . . Of course, if they wish to dig their own grave, they are fully at liberty to do so."

These were strong words. However provoked he may have been to speak out, such words from the Deputy Prime Minister of India could not possibly be said to have helped Pandit Nehru, who was labouring to bring about peace with our important neighbour.

Notwithstanding all the assurances to the contrary, there has been in India a marked tendency within the Congress party itself to compare and contrast the work of one against the other. It was to be seen when Sardar Patel paid a visit to Bombay some seven weeks after Pandit Nehru received his tremendous ovation on the Chowpatty sands.

Patel had come at the invitation of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee, who wanted to have the opportunity of felicitating him on his seventy-fourth birthday. On the same Chowpatty sands the Sardar was presented with an iron mace on which there were seventy-four golden rings, "a ring for each golden year of sacrifice"! But the real idea was to show to the country that the Sardar was the iron man of India. The iron mace was meant to symbolize his strength, and the Sardar accepted it as such.

Now if the Sardar were the iron man of India, he was obviously stronger than the men around him. It implied, therefore, that he was also stronger than Pandit Nehru. Those who presented the Sardar with the mace intended that comparison, which was unfortunate, especially at a time when the strength of all should have gone into a common pool.

* * * * *

I was rung up one day in September 1948 by one of the most important men in the country who was also one of Pandit Nehru's most trusted friends. He was on his way out of India that night and said he had just rung me to ask how I was getting on and to say goodbye. I thought it odd that he should find time to pay such special attention to me. He had often left for abroad but he had never done this before. So after a little friendly patter I asked: "Now tell me what is really on your mind." He laughed. He said the Press had an uncanny sense of smell. Then he told me that there was a definite campaign to discredit Nehru, and that the criticism which was appearing in my paper about the Prime Minister was unwittingly doing him a great deal of damage. It was helping the subversive campaign against Nehru.

I knew of this campaign. I was also aware that our criticism of the Prime Minister might do a certain amount of

harm to him. In spite of his many weaknesses, Jawaharlal was still a great man, to be respected and followed. He was also the only person who could lead the country to-day. Even so, I explained to my friend, his actions as the Prime Minister of India had to be criticized in the national interest. I could not stand by and see these relatives of his trading on their relationship to him without speaking openly against it.

At the same time I gave the assurance that while I would continue to criticize Pandit Nehru's actions and his politics and, above all, his bunch of clinging relatives, I would see to it that no third party would be able to make capital out of these criticisms for their personal and political ends.

I kept that promise. I made it quite clear that neither my paper nor I held any brief for Sardar Patel and those who hung round him. The very fact that within a few weeks I began to be regularly attacked by a group of newspapers over which the Sardar's son had control proved that I had kept my word.

The *status quo* in the political leadership of India will remain as it is. Pandit Nehru is still the outstanding man in India, even though he is playing the odd role of a progressive surrounded by reactionaries, and no other single individual can command the confidence of the whole country.

If only he were to break away from this setting and become a progressive surrounded by progressives, he would have the courage and the conviction to fulfil the promise he once held out. That would be the Nehru we could follow with heart and mind.

XVII

CAULIFLOWER AU GRATIN

TEN YEARS AGO—more precisely in January 1939—I was in that same little village of Bardoli where Sardar Patel first made his name. I was taken there by Mangaldas Pakvasa, an ardent Congressman and a devout follower of Gandhi. Pakvasa was then President of the Bombay Legislative Council, which is equivalent to being the Speaker of the provincial upper house.

I was feeling my way in the country, for I had only just returned from England and was finding my feet as a journalist.

The Congress then seemed the only hope for the country. It had for the first time come into office in the provinces. Everyone in a Gandhi cap appeared a nationalist and a hero.

Mangaldas Pakvasa was a college friend of my father's, a solicitor by profession, who had taken a particularly keen interest in me, for I was his friend's son and "quite a bright lad" by repute. Soon after I met him he said he would take me with him to see Mahatma Gandhi, whom I had so much wanted to meet.

That was how we went together, for the Mahatma was in Bardoli at the time. There could have been no better setting in which to have seen Gandhi than in this little village which formed the background of his early struggle.

Geographically unimportant, strategically insignificant, Bardoli had carved out a name for itself which would go down in the annals of our history. It will register for posterity the sacrifices and the sorrows of our people. It will recall also the victories that followed, and their significance. Bardoli crystallized the whole doctrine of that non-violent passive resistance offered by the masses which has made it possible for us to be free from the British to-day.

I remember that village so well, even though ten whole years have passed. Things moved slowly in that part of the world, for time had no great significance for those people.

To them, an hour here or there made no difference, for all hours of the day, the month and the year seemed so much alike. On occasions of importance they would collect in the village square and sit on the ground waiting patiently for that moment to come.

I saw them collect there that afternoon, for some of the Congress leaders were to speak to them. I remember those faces even now. They bore the scars of the wars they had fought. Their eyes reflected the agonies of their world—the poverty, the squalor, death and disease which had destroyed their people—which they hoped they would one day be able to conquer under a people's government. That was their hope through the years of defeat and of frustration: a people's government.

To them life was so intensely real that there was no time nor opportunity, nor even inclination, to dabble in the unreal things of life. Art, music and literature seemed out of place in that Indian village. It was the land first, the land second, and the land last, until death parted them from the land. The land was food, it was life, it was hope, it was the future. These people thought in terms of cattle and harvests and of a square meal, instead of colours or sounds or words. How else could they think when life was a perpetual borderline existence?

There were only two brick houses in Bardoli; the rest were made of mud and cow-dung. One was the ginning factory, the outhouse of which was our resting place for the night; the other was the *ashram* (rest house) across the road, in which the Mahatma stayed. A little after sunset it was time for the evening meal. Like all others, I sat cross-legged on the flood. My back was aching for I had been jolted about in a bullock cart all day. My throat was parched with the dust I had swallowed.

A few oil lamps lit the bare room and the food was served on a metal platter. Everyone ate with their fingers, of course.

Mangaldas Pakvasa turned to me and asked if I felt comfortable eating that way. "It's not like Oxford and England, you know," he said, "but it's the way we Indians eat. It is the way of our people; it is the national way."

That was an unnecessary remark, for I had never allowed

myself to forget I was an Indian. My being an Indian did not depend upon the way in which I ate my food. I could, like all Indians, always eat with my fingers without the slightest discomfort or embarrassment.

What impressed me, however, was not the way in which we sat or the way in which we ate, so much as the plain, simple food which was served to those who were dining with me that night. Squatted on the floor near and around me that evening were Sardar Patel, Mridula Sarabhai, a millionaire's daughter, a few other people of that standard of power and wealth, and Pakvasa himself. And on that platter before me there was some rice and *dal* (thick lentil soup), some curds, a few assorted vegetables cooked in *ghee* and two raw tomatoes. That was all.

In 1948 I happened to be dining with Mangaldas Pakvasa again. It was at Government House, Nagpur. He was now His Excellency the Governor of the Central Provinces, and I was his guest for lunch. We were just the two of us and he was as kind and hospitable to me as ever, even though I had veered away from my ardent admiration for the Congress.

But this time we did not sit on the floor. A couple of turbaned waiters shepherded me into my seat and the table at which I dined was a highly polished affair. All that, of course, could be overlooked, for the furniture had been in Government House from the days of the British. But when my eye fell on my menu card I read the neatly typed words "*Cauliflower au Gratin.*"

I turned to my host and said: "It's been a long time since we ate together at Bardoli."

"Yes," he replied, "it has. So many changes have occurred. Then we were fighting for *swaraj*. Now freedom has come." He paused, then added: "Yes, we have come a long way from that day in Bardoli."

We had. But our thoughts were not running in the same direction.

I knew that the peasants of Bardoli were never likely to have "*Cauliflower au Gratin.*"

XVIII

THE FOOD OF THE PEOPLE

UNTIL THE MIDDLE OF 1942, food presented no problem to anybody in India except the poorest classes. Our normal imports were about a million and a half tons of Burma rice and this quantity was easily available. Production in Burma was plentiful and supplies were moved in easily.

The fall of Burma first made our people conscious of the difficulties involved in a shortage of food. Supplies grew scarce, prices rose and the government, then British-controlled, found itself faced with a problem so serious that the consequences of failure to tackle it promptly would have resulted in overwhelming disaster in every field of activity.

Our food problem at that stage was merged into the problem of winning the war. In fact efficient management of food became a pre-requisite to survival.

The government of India was, as usual, caught unprepared. Whereas in western countries plans had been laid many years before the war for dealing with the food difficulties that might arise consequent upon the war, very little had been done in India. There was not even a Department of Food in the central government nor was there any concerted policy which could be handed down to the provinces. Each province was left to find its own way out of the problems of shortage of supply and uneven distribution.

It was the good fortune of the government of Bombay in particular and the country in general that at this time the administration in Bombay was both efficient and vigorous. The Congress ministries having resigned office at the beginning of the war, the small government of the provinces had devolved on the permanent services, the Governor and three nominated advisers forming the Cabinet. In Bombay the new and serious problems that food brought fell within the portfolio of Finance, which was administered by Sir Henry F. Knight.

A short, spare, thoughtful man with an impish glint often lighting his serious countenance, Knight was one of those exceptions to the orthodox type which the British in India and elsewhere have thrown up from time to time. To efficient management and a grasp of principles as well as details he added an originality of thought rare amongst those confined to the minutiæ of administration for many years. He had vision and he saw the real gravity of the problem long before it became apparent, while other people were still regarding it as a mere temporary difficulty.

Knight was fortunate too in the administrators he selected for the development and execution of the policy which he knew would have to be evolved to tide over the crisis. The chief of these was his Supply Commissioner, a brilliant young civil servant, Mr. A. D. Gorwala, a tough, stern, unapproachable and yet cheerful public servant, with an incredible store of drive and energy and a sense of right and wrong which assessed all action in relation to its effect on the public interest.

These two men created the department from almost nothing. With the principal political party in opposition they gathered together sufficient public support to carry through measures which they thought necessary. With the assistance of some of the ablest men in the province they evolved a policy which has stood the test of time and which was recommended as a model by the government of India to the provinces, and which the Congress Prime Minister of Bombay mentioned with pride seven years later.

The first measure adopted by Knight was to ration Bombay. Until then, the general view had been, even in informed quarters, that it was utterly impossible to ration a large urban population in this country. Ignorance, illiteracy, lack of public spirit and orderly behaviour were regarded as handicaps which could never be overcome. Bombay went ahead with the arrangements for rationing undeterred by these fears. To the amazement of everyone, when the appointed day arrived, rationing functioned without the least difficulty The ignorant mill-labourer and the illiterate fishwife knew almost by instinct what they had to do with their ration cards and how to get their rations.

As the food position became more difficult and the in-

cidents of the shortage spread from the cities to the smaller towns and the rural areas, further measures became necessary and a comprehensive policy was evolved.

The main principles on which this new policy was founded were:

1. On the distribution side: the rationing of all towns of a population of 5,000 and over, and rural distribution in other areas.
2. On the supply side: monopoly procurement and a compulsory levy.

Monopoly procurement meant that no one could sell grain, save in very limited quantities within a village, except to the government. Compulsory levy laid down that every cultivator who produced more than a certain limited quantity should sell a proportion of his produce to the government.

By these measures all available resources were mobilized for equitable distribution.

It was made quite clear that no one could play about with the food of the people. Whether a man was a millionaire or a sweeper, he received the same rations. The millionaire could not buy up and hoard grain in order to force the prices and make a profit.

On the other side of the peninsula, in the province of Bengal, a weak and inefficient administration permitted one of the greatest tragedies this country has ever suffered, the Bengal famine. The greater public spirit shown by the majority of the citizens of Bombay and the courage and ability of its administration saved this province from a similar fate. Measures more or less on these same lines were soon adopted throughout the country.

As the war years succeeded one another the food position became more and more difficult. Shipping was a great problem. It was not possible to bring in sufficient imports. The reserves were being eaten up and the necessity for full use of available resources was never more evident. The ration, which had been fixed at 1 lb. per head to begin with, was reduced to 12 oz. and delegations left the country for the U.K. and the U.S.A. to try and persuade the International

Emergency Council to make large supplies available to India, especially as the crops had failed disastrously over large areas in the south and west of the Indian peninsula. This was due to the failure of the monsoon.

This was the position in 1946, when the interim ministry of which the Congress party formed the majority took office. Apart from food, the cost of living generally was high. During the earlier war years, industrial goods had rushed up in price. The rampant inflation had to some extent been checked by the bringing in of controls, and when power passed into popular hands there was in existence throughout the country a system which, however jerkily it worked and whatever its defects, held prices.

The first decisions of the popular government in this domain were not altogether fortunate. Jute was freed from control and its prices allowed to shoot up. Sugar-cane prices were raised and it seemed to some of the more experienced members of the government that, unless measures were taken to stop the rot, inflation would resume its upward trend.

Accordingly it was decided to appoint an independent expert body to fix prices of controlled commodities and build up a proper price structure during the transitional period. The ex-Supply Commissioner of Bombay, Gorwala, was appointed president and Professor D. R. Gadgil, of the Gokhale School of Economics and Politics in Poona, was appointed member of this body.

It would be difficult to find a truer picture of all that is best in the ancient Indian tradition than Gadgil. A slim, gaunt man, argumentative and aggressive on the right occasions, full of courage and with a wisdom grounded in deep knowledge of both theory and facts, Gadgil had devoted himself for many years to the building up of a true school of politics and economics, eschewing all profitable pursuit. On occasion after occasion he had turned down offers of employment by the government. He joined the Board primarily because he felt the situation in the country was so critical that a right lead was essential and without the right lead it might become disastrous.

This Board, consisting of Gorwala and Gadgil, presented a series of reports to the government. In one of these—on

controls and their continuance[1]—it asked for an enunciation of policy. It said:

"It is extremely urgent that the government should formulate a definite policy towards control and announce it with the greatest possible speed. The present situation is unfortunate from all points of view. A régime of controls exists, yet persons in authority and responsible leaders of public opinion talk as if it was nothing but an evil which should be abolished immediately. In such a climate of opinion, no control régime can survive, for everybody thinks it is proper to violate it. Every trader contemplates hoarding and getting the most out of the process of abolition, and very few non-officials have their heart in working or in forcing controls. There is very little doubt that if the government really thinks that controls are undesirable, it would be best to abolish them as completely and speedily as possible. On the other hand, if the government decides that it cannot afford to abolish controls and that the conditions following decontrol would be akin to chaos, the government must not only keep up controls but integrate them, explain them and enforce them."

The brilliant reports of this expert body received scant attention from the Congress government. The reason was perhaps that, if the Congress had accepted the Board's view, an influential section of those vested interests which supported the Congress would have stood to lose those huge profits which were possible only in a free market in food grains.

The two men on the Commodity Prices Board were incorruptible and their reports, therefore, stood in the way of decontrol. For a long time these reports were not even made available to the public, for the government of Jawaharlal Nehru had refused to publish them or release them to the Press. They only came to light when, at the request of members of the Dominion Parliament, they were put on the table of the House and therefore became public property. Then the Gokhale Institute published them in volume form.

The trend towards decontrol could not be resisted by the politicians. The government appointed a Food-grains Policy

[1] Report of the Commodity Prices Board.

Committee, consisting of its own handpicked men, to re-examine the food policy. At the same time Mahatma Gandhi himself took the field in favour of decontrol. By this time Gorwala and Gadgil, having found their advice neglected and not being willing to be party to decisions which they felt would be disastrous to the country, had resigned.

To the Mahatma, with his philosophical approach to the problems of good and evil, his somewhat anarchical view of the necessity of government and his Tolstoyan desire to minimize the interference of the government in human affairs, it was inevitable that control should appear a most undesirable manifestation of the power of the state. His whole attitude to life was the doing of good by persuasion. This mental outlook accorded well with the desire of vested interests to compel the government to adopt a course of action which would be profitable to their class.

The Mahatma at that time was living in the house of the most powerful representative of that class. There he daily came into contact with people who ascribed all the difficulties of the country to controls. It was no wonder, therefore, that in a specially written message on one of his days of silence at a prayer meeting in New Delhi he demanded the immediate abolition of food controls.

The fact that Mahatma Gandhi had elected to put his views down in writing, and chosen a day of silence to announce a new policy on so vital a matter, indicated that that pronouncement had been seriously thought out and put down in words which were carefully chosen. He did not want to speak on it in his usual informal way.

The theme of that message was summed up in one word: DECONTROL. Gandhi said: "Nothing that I have heard during these days has moved me from the stand taken up from the very beginning that food control must be entirely removed as early as possible, certainly not later than six months hence."

On a delicate subject like food, it was more politic that the first pronouncement of a change in policy should come from a person like Mahatma Gandhi in whom the people had infinite trust.

"Control gives rise to fraud, suppression of truth, intensification of black market and artificial scarcity," the message

continued. "Above all, it unmans the people and deprives them of initiative; it undoes the teaching of self-help they have been learning for a generation. It makes them spoon-fed."

According to the Mahatma, inasmuch as monsoons had not failed that year, there was no real scarcity of food. "There are," he said, "enough cereals, pulses and oil seeds in the villages of India. The growers do not and cannot understand the artificially controlled prices. They, therefore, refuse to part willingly with their stock at a price much lower than they could command in the open market. This naked fact needs no demonstration."

Then he added: "It does not require statistics or desk-work civilians buried in their red-taped files to produce elaborate reports and essays to prove that there is scarcity. . . . Our ministers are of the people, from the people. Let them not arrogate to themselves greater knowledge THAN THOSE EXPERIENCED MEN WHO DO NOT HAPPEN TO OCCUPY MINISTERIAL CHAIRS, BUT WHO HOLD THE VIEW STRONGLY THAT THE SOONER THE CONTROL IS REMOVED THE BETTER."

The Mahatma then put out a little of his unique philosophy. He said: "If the people die because they will not labour or because they will defraud one another, it will be a welcome deliverance."

"Trust The Dealer" was his decontrol slogan.

Mahatma Gandhi was, as I said, staying at the time in Birla House. The presumption, therefore, was very strong that those "experienced men" he spoke of came from the house itself. So that an important change in the economic policy of the country occurred at the instance of influential interests outside the government.

Moreover the Foodgrains Policy Committee, by a majority decision, supported Mahatma Gandhi's view and foodgrains were forthwith decontrolled.

The government was not, however, unadvised on the consequences that would follow. Immediately after the Mahatma's statement, the former President of the Commodities Prices Board, who having handed in his resignation from the service was on leave preparatory to retirement, wrote a series of articles in the *Statesman* pointing out how com-

pletely disastrous decontrol would be and how no civilized government could give up their responsibility towards their people merely because that would absolve them temporarily from their difficulties.

In the first of these articles[1] Gorwala said: "However distasteful it is to differ from Mahatma Gandhi, the public interest demands comment on his latest pronouncement on the subject of food control and rationing."

Of the Mahatma philosophy that "if people died because they would not labour or because they would defraud one another it would be a welcome deliverance", Gorwala said: "Surely no civilized government can contemplate methods which they know must result in death and distress to any section of their people in the hope that this will have a salutary effect on other sections."

"It was absurd to say," Gorwala went on, "that those who were going to suffer and die would be the lazy and the fraudulent. The distress would be greatest among the poor, hard-working industrial workers and agricultural labourers who have no way of getting their food except by buying it, and who would find it very difficult to pay the high prices which would result from decontrol.

"Is their death in large numbers, through no fault of their own, to be regarded as a welcome deliverance? Will this have a chastening effect on the profiteers? Let Bengal with its millions of dead in 1943 bear witness."

The Mahatma had spoken of leaving it to the good sense of the grain dealers. Gorwala asked: "Is there any reason for holding the view that the dealer in grain is of a moral calibre higher than that of other dealers?"

That this view was correct has been borne out by subsequent events, for within eight months of decontrol the government of India was forced to bring controls back again, having in the meanwhile done irreparable damage to the entire economy by raising costs in all spheres by 30%.

The ill-inspired handling of the situation did not cease, however, with recontrol. Both energy and ability seemed to be lacking in the government. The Finance Minister declared that prices would go down in April 1949. He later

[1] The *Statesman*, November 16th, 1947.

changed the date to May, but even that did not happen. And by June they started moving up again.

Let me give you in very rough figures the comparative costs of some items from a middle-class housewife's market book, to illustrate the rise in food prices from 1939 to 1949:

	1939.		*1949.*	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Chicken	1	8	4	6
Fish (one plaice or pomfret) ...		6	3	0
Mutton (per lb.)		6	1	8
Beef (per lb.)		4	1	0
Eggs (per dozen)		6	2	3
Potatoes (per lb.)		1½		4
Sugar (per lb.)		2½		7
Milk (per seer measure)		4	1	6
Butter (per lb.)		10	4	6

To-day, therefore, meat and fish are prohibitive in price for the working class and for domestic servants, while ten years ago these people were able to include this protein diet occasionally in their food. A whole class of Indians has been emaciated as a result, being compelled to eat an inferior diet, which has less nutrition value, and fill their stomachs with starch and lentils which can only temporarily appease their gnawing hungers.

In the face of this slow deterioration which has set in, Pandit Nehru made a staggering pronouncement to the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce in March 1949. To the amazement of everyone, he said that "no matter what happened, EVEN IF PEOPLE DIED", India did not propose to import food after two years, that is from 1952 onwards. The Prime Minister based this decision on the equally astonishing premise that "the food shortage of India was about 10% of the total quantity consumed in the country". He said: "We must make up this deficit by making adjustments in our diet and by growing more food. . . . Let us make up our minds to live on the food we produce, or die in the attempt."

Bravo!

An American correspondent writing from India for a responsible U.S. business journal revealed: "Despite all her efforts so far, India's food imports are sky-rocketing. Last

year she had to import 2·8 million metric tons of foodgrains at a cost of roughly $390 million. This year it is officially estimated that she will need up to 4 million metric tons which will set her back $450 million, of which nearly half will be in hard currencies."

Statistics and figures available from official sources indicate that, even as a result of the drive to "Grow More Food", the increase in tilled acreage is only from 170 million prewar to 186 million to-day. Moreover the Indian Prime Minister's statement, if taken seriously, would involve a breach of the International Wheat Agreement under which we are committed to import wheat at least up to 1954.

The truth is that our government has now come to a stage when it has neither the food to sustain the country nor the funds to buy it from elsewhere. The Prime Minister's gesture of solving his food problem with the lives of Indians, who will die of starvation after 1952, is therefore the only official way out.

The story of how this pompous and quite absurd pronouncement came to be made about self-sufficiency, completely unsubstantiable by facts, revealed how vital policies are shaped in the government of India. Few people in India know even to-day that this vital decision was made by ONE MAN and apparently on the spur of the moment. The departments concerned were not even aware that such a decision was contemplated. They had certainly not provided the material from which a decision could be made or any such conclusion drawn. In fact the departments were as thunderstruck as was the rest of India when it appeared in the papers the next morning.

It happened like this: when Pandit Nehru got up to address the Federation of the Indian Chambers of Commerce, he found the emphasis of the criticism levelled against his government was on the large sums spent on the import of food from abroad. The Prime Minister obviously could not let this pass. Therefore, without any further thought, he decreed there and then that within two years self-sufficiency would prevail and all food imports be stopped, even if people had to die to make the remainder self-sufficient.

Long before Jawaharlal, King Canute, his ego bolstered

up by his flattering followers, tried some such idea with the waters of the sea.

Once our Prime Minister had made his momentous pronouncement, all the departments of the government of India sprang to action. Soon the "Imperial" Secretariat was bustling with energy. A torrent of plans, blueprints, diagrams and outlines poured forth from the departments of Agriculture and Food. There followed meetings of Central and provincial government representatives. Lord Boyd Orr was invited out from England. Special Food Commissioners were appointed. Yet with all this, the achievement of self-sufficiency by the prescribed deadline remained a vision impossible to fulfil.

The most competent experts on food, Mr. Dodds, Chairman of the F.A.O., and Sir Ramamurthy, who was for many years Food Adviser in Madras, maintained that there was very little likelihood of our being able to do without at least a billion tons of imports for many years to come. There was good ground for such a belief, for even in the days when we had the rich, irrigated, surplus lands of the Punjab and Sind within India and our population was proportionately lower, our net imports were a million and a half tons. Now, with conditions worsened in every part both by partition and increase of poulation, it would be living in a fool's paradise to imagine that we could live on the food we produce two years from now.

Naked facts, however, did not deter our leaders from making pompous pronouncements. When foodgrain prices were rising all over the country, there was a debate in the Indian Parliament in which the gravity of the situation was pointed out by some members. The Food Minister, Jairamdas Daulatram, who had made himself exceptionally conspicuous by the fatuity of his utterances, summed up the official point of view by saying: "Let us not say we die until we are dead."

Remarks like these prompted another article in the *Statesman*. This time it was not from Mr. Gorwala but purported to come from the *Statesman's* special correspondent, who said:

"It must now be clear even to the most mediocre intelligence that the inflation from which we are suffering is the

creation of the present government of India. . . . Its understanding of economic matters is slight, its appreciation of advice insignificant, its belief in its own knowledge and ability unbounded. *Its trusted advisers in economic matters were men who had helped it with funds in its political fight and who had everything to gain by the destruction of the existing system* [of control] *which limited their opportunities for profits.*"

The special correspondent went further. He openly asked the question whether there was any real desire on the part of the government to combat inflation or whether the subconscious hatred of control and the desire to make profits still animated the expressed desire to control prices and check inflation. "Anti-inflation cannot be successful," he said, "unless those who hold power and authority are enthusiastic about it and are determined to make it work, whatever the odds against it. If you have no conviction, you cannot carry conviction to others. . . . There are over a hundred ministers and parliamentary secretaries in the whole of India. The usual practice in democratic countries is for office-holders to go down to places where they have local influence and speak during week-ends on matters of national importance, combining the local aspects with the national problem, so that the measures necessary for the achievement of national objects are brought home to common men's hearts and homes. . . . But this can only be possible if the ministers themselves are first convinced of the necessity of these measures and support them both in principle and practice without reservation. . . . Inflation has been brought about by the failure of the government. Its continuance is rightly regarded as a continuance of that failure."[1]

This *Statesman* article did a lot of damage to the prestige of the government and to the leadership of the Congress. In an attempt to counteract this, there appeared in the same paper a letter to the editor[2] from the Secretary of the Economic and Political Research Department of the All-India Congress Committee, an impressive designation for an obscure individual, by name Mr. K. Mitra. His job was to try

[1] *Statesman,* January 1st, 1949.
[2] *Statesman,* January 7th, 1949.

and bolster up the tottering prestige of the Congress which was being shattered all over the country by men who were speaking out against all they thought was dishonest.

The defender of the Congress said: "It is a sheer travesty of truth to say that the present government decided in favour of decontrol because they had been 'advised by men who had helped in the political fight and who had everything to gain by disturbing the existing system which limited their profits'. The voice which wanted controls lifted was that of Mahatma Gandhi, and who in this country will challenge his *bona fides*?"

The idea of sheltering behind Gandhi's *bona fides* was not an original one. But the Mahatma had admitted he was relying upon the judgement of "experienced men who do not happen to occupy ministerial chairs" to bring about decontrol.

"Fourteen out of the fifteen provinces and states consulted at the decontrol conference in 1947 were opposed to decontrol," the special correspondent said in reply to the pious Congressman. "The time has certainly come when we should realize that even the best are on occasion liable to err. Idol worship accords ill with the spirit of a free nation. Clearly on this question of decontrol the Mahatma was grievously wrong and to admit this freely in no way detracts from his unique greatness. . . . Mr. Mitra accuses me of sapping the people's confidence in the government. This is a common excuse of autocrats who, in the name of patriotism, seek to throttle legitimate life-giving criticism. . . . The best friend of any government is not he who continually prostrates himself in admiration, but he who brings to light that which needs to be set right."

The government of India's Food Minister, the same Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram, awoke on another morning to the realization that "death" was coming nearer, and so decided to put things right. He therefore made another fatuous statement on the food problem. This time he said that from now on the food problem was going to be tackled at high level and was *therefore* likely to be solved.

One of the *March* boys who wrote a weekly column as "The Dope" made the following comment on the Food Minister's statement:

"Do you know why we have failed so far to solve our desperate food problem? The reason is childishly simple, so simple that even a goof like me can twig it. All the food conferences that have been held at New Delhi and elsewhere in government quarters have been at low-level or mid-level apparently—and for all the good they've done they might not have been held at all. Now Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram promises action at a high level; you may be sure, therefore, that the problem will be solved in a trice.

"We've been over all that before. We've been setting up '*machinery*' to deal with food scarcity for ever so long—but it just won't get working. Maybe it's the wrong kind of machinery the government has been setting up. If the famine situation worsens then the best machinery to set up would be burning ghats and graves.

"The famine in Gujerat has been developing for the last six months. But it is only now that the Food Minister has woken up to the fact that there's no co-ordination of the administration.

"While Jairamdas Daulatram reviews the food problem at the highest level, people, and what's more important—the 'dumb, dear cattle' so much loved by the cow-protectors, are dying by slow degrees. This is in spite of the spirited declaration made by our own Home Minister in a recent tour of the famine-stricken areas, that not one soul would be permitted to starve to death. . . .

"This Dope thinks that Mr. Jairamdas Daulatram and other worthy statesmen of this country who are perpetually reviewing questions of national importance at all sorts of levels, ought to realize that food cannot grow in departmental files and hot-air chambers, but right down at the lowest level—in the earth. Less oral, more manual exertion, should be the motto of the servants of the people."

"The Dope" reflected the frustrated mood of the country.

XIX

PINKS AND REDS

I WAS RETURNING FROM the stables one evening when, outside the Royal Western India Turf Club, I saw a group of some hundred sweepers and workmen. The average intelligence quotient of this group could not have been very high. It included a number of women who were totally illiterate.

A young man wearing a shirt and a pair of pants, obviously a desk worker and of a higher economic wage-earning level, was addressing them that evening.

The workers were on strike over their dearness allowance and the young man was telling them in clear, determined tones, and in simple language, how the negotiations with the management were progressing.

I pulled up my car along that otherwise deserted road and listened to him speak. It was one of the most matter-of-fact speeches I have heard from a small-time agitator. He spoke of no abstract ideals and made no great promise of what he could do for them. He used no words of abuse against those he was fighting. He was merely concerned with obtaining for that inarticulate, almost dumb, group those few extra rupees which, in view of the rising cost of living, were essential to them.

The men and women listened to him in pin-fall silence. When he finished what he had to say, he told them to go peacefully and quietly home, promising that he would come again the next day at the same place and the same time to report on the next day's negotiations.

Then his voice changed, and in loud ringing tones he said: "Before we disperse let us once again reaffirm our faith in the red flag behind which we workers stand united, for in unity alone is our salvation."

And as with one voice that group chorused: "Jai!"

They gave three rousing cheers to the red flag which I then noticed was tied to the trunk of a nearby tree. It was the same red flag which they used to indicate danger when a manhole had been taken up but on this occasion it stood,

almost impertinently, for a demand the like of which they had never dared to make in the past.

On the broad canvas of Indian politics this would appear to be just a silly little meeting of a handful of disgruntled workmen who had no mind of their own and who were not even properly organized, but it showed a new trend in our national life. Hitherto the meetings in India had chiefly been on political issues. They had demanded freedom and civil liberty from the British. To-day the spotlight was not on freedom; it had veered to the economic inequality. These little impromptu wayside meetings, silly as they seemed, were even more important than those which were larger and more organized. The rise in the cost of living, though world-wide, had hit India even more severely than most countries, because here the millions had for so long been on the borderline of starvation that a single rupee less meant all the difference between life and death. Any change in the balance between wage-earnings and prices, even though both may increase, could wipe out whole sections of people who had no resistance to fall back upon.

There was a time when the Congress in India was synonymous with the broad masses of the people. The struggle for freedom had always been a mass struggle, and the Congress had succeeded in ousting the British *raj* only because the masses were solidly behind it. It was then laid down by the Congress that, when power should finally come into Indian hands and there would be responsible governments functioning in place of the British-controlled bureaucracy, these governments would put into effect a Socialist programme which was then being studied by the National Planning Committee of which Jawaharlal Nehru was the chairman.

In the two years in which Congress governments have functioned at the Centre and in the provinces, there has been little indication of promoting Socialism in India or of encouraging any genuine trade union movement. On the contrary, the tendency has been to break up whatever strength the workers may have gathered in the years. Governmental machinery now at the disposal of the Congress has been used to liquidate the trade unions here. The government of Pandit Nehru had even gone so far as to make plans to put on the statute book an anti-strike bill,

but this idea was abandoned when world opinion began to express itself too emphatically on the way things were moving in India under the administration of a man who had professed to all the world that he was a revolutionary Socialist.

In the British House of Commons, Mr. Leslie Hutchinson, the Labour M.P. who was one of the accused in the famous Meerut trial in India, commented on this proposed anti-strike bill: "To one who in the past played a small part in fighting for Indian independence, the present policy of the Nehru government is most disappointing. The arrest of trade union leaders, the mass imprisonment of left-wing critics of the Indian government's policy, the introduction of a new strike-breaking law, equal and in some cases exceed the repressive policy of the British administration in the early 1930s. In my opinion, leaders like Pandit Nehru must make up their minds which way they are going."

In that same week the British Prime Minister had rejected in the House a suggestion that he should introduce anti-Communist legislation in Britain on the lines of India and France. Mr. Attlee did not think such legislation was "necessary or desirable". In reply to Sir Waldron Smithers, a Conservative, Mr. Attlee said: "I don't know whether Sir Waldron has studied the somewhat drastic measures that are being taken by provincial governments in India, and whether he and his party generally support the power to detain without trial on suspicion of subversive activity. . . ." The majority of the House of Commons cheered Mr. Attlee's reply, for democracy still had some meaning to the elected representatives of the British people.

Therefore, when Pandit Nehru declared that his government had changed its mind regarding the anti-strike bill, the feeling in India was that world opinion rather than opinion at home had succeeded in making its influence felt on our government.

The strikes that have taken place in India in various industries, in public and utility services, among workers in various parts of the country, have exploded the idea that the people are behind the Congress as they were in the days before independence.

The Congress is still making desperate attempts to hold

on to the influence it once had over the working class, but they are steadily losing ground. They no longer hold the mind and heart of the Indian worker. The Congress influence over the peasant, however, still remains strong, because changes take time to reach the Indian peasants who are scattered all over the face of the country and who take time to respond to the very idea of a change. The history of the world, however, shows that revolutions of the mind take place in the cities first, among the industrial workers and among the lower middle class, and that the agrarian *petit bourgeoisie* and the peasant arrive much later on the changing scene.

In addition to the Congress, there are two main political parties in India racing to grasp the leadership of this discontented industrial working class which is rapidly turning away from the Congress. These two parties are the Socialists and the Communists.

The Socialists were originally a handful of left-wingers in the Congress party itself. They really grew up within the Congress fold. In the days of Mahatma Gandhi they were regarded as a trifle more politically sophisticated than the general run of Congressmen. While they accepted the over-all leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru, they comprised the more westernized, intellectual nucleus of left-wingers as distinct from the average Congressman whose reading did not go further than Gandhi's editorials in the *Harijan*. Compared with their country cousins, the Socialists were the young intellectuals. Some of them had read well of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Engels and Marx, and the usual primers for intellectual left-winging. Some grew long hair and looked somewhat like Indian versions of Chelsea artists, but these were few.

The man who led these Socialists was one of the toughest in the country. His name was Jai Prakash Narayan.

Jai Prakash was a peasant's son. He was born in a little village in the province of Bihar and grew up on the land. Only at the age of nineteen did he come out of his village. That was when he saw a tram-car for the first time in his life. In search of learning he went to America, where he lived for eight years and studied at different universities. In order to help pay for his education, he worked on a farm

in California, gathering fruit. He had also worked as a mechanic in a shop and as a waiter in a small-town restaurant. After his day's work he did his reading of literature, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, economics and sociology.

Jai Prakash Narayan, who is more familiarly known by his initials, J. P., came to the popular forefront in India in 1940, when he showed a tendency to digress from the non-violent way of resisting laid down by Mahatma Gandhi. The speeches which Jai Prakash Narayan made against the British indicated that he was prepared to use violence as a short cut to freedom. All this happened during the early days of the war and he was naturally clapped into jail. Dramatically he escaped from prison and equally dramatically he disappeared underground.

On the eve of the famous Quit India resolution of August 8th, 1942, when Indian political feeling was at fever-pitch, J.P. headed the group of young men who presented Gandhi with a complete plan of action, based on violence. That plan was never discussed by the Congress leaders, nor would it ever have been acceptable to the apostle of non-violence. It showed, however, that a section of the Congress was willing to take such a step.

J.P. made no bones about his belief in violence. When he was arrested on a train outside Amritsar, in which he was travelling first-class in the disguise of a member of a ruling family of an Indian state, he said to the authorities that if he felt violence were necessary to achieve freedom he would use it *again.* Such was the background of the man around whom Socialism in India pivots.

I called on Jai Prakash in November 1948, a few months after his party had broken away from the apron-strings of the Congress. The party headquarters was in Dadar, a suburb of Bombay, in the heart of the industrial north of the big city. The Socialists occupied a floor of an unimpressive building, somewhat like a tenement.

The Jai Prakash who received me in his little office was no longer thinking in terms of revolutions. He had changed to thinking in terms of constitutional and democratic opposition.

I reminded him of what he had said in 1942 about using

violence if he thought it were necessary. "Would you use it now if you felt you were justified?" I asked.

J.P. said: "I once told Mahatma Gandhi that I used violence only to fight a foreign power and that I would not use it to fight an Indian government."

"Why not?" I asked him.

"For one thing," he replied, "it would not succeed."

Jai Prakash had no exaggerated opinion of the power of the party he led. He was a realist. He said: "The Congress is still very strong in the country to-day. If there were another election now they would win. The people are still very sympathetic towards the Congress. After all it is the Congress which led the fight to freedom and got freedom for us. People tell me: 'Give them a chance.' Therefore, we have to consider very carefully what tactics we adopt when dealing with the Congress.

"The public feeling to-day is for co-operation, not opposition," he explained. "Sardar Patel has been stressing this point of late, urging us, who have broken away from the Congress, to work within its sphere of influence. But that is our fundamental difference with the Congress. We feel there must be an opposition in order to build a real democracy."

While he spoke of the need for an opposition, there seemed to me no clear-cut issue on which that Socialist party could offer that opposition, and, so long as the Congress governments continued to use emergency powers to stifle all effective opposition, there seemed to be no clear way in which they could make that opposition effective.

I turned to him and said: "As an impartial observer—a newspaperman who belongs to no political party—I find that your attitude is not sufficiently convincing to induce an intelligent man to follow your lead. You appear to have left the Congress with a wrenched heart. You are still so eager to stress that although you have left the Congress you have much in common with it. You also say that much of the Congress's policy is in keeping with Socialist ideology. What, then, are your points of difference?"

"On paper the Congress says much the same as we do," he replied. "For instance the economic programme evolved by the National Planning Committee, on which I served

with Pandit Nehru, Dr. Mathai and others, was essentially a Socialist programme. But what the Congress puts down on paper it does not translate into action. Our differences with the Congress are, therefore, mainly economic. These differences have always existed, even when we were part of the Congress organization. For a long while we have wanted to break clear of the rest of the Congress organization, but this could not happen until freedom was won."

He then went on to explain how when partition came, the Socialists felt that here was an issue on which they should strike out for themselves. "But had we left the Congress on that issue the break would not have brought out the economic character of the Socialist party," J.P. said. "Moreover, Mahatma Gandhi had said to me 'Don't divide the house. Make a statement so that no one can misunderstand you.' We had so much regard for the Mahatma that we decided to abide by what he said. We made a statement on partition and remained in the Congress. After that there was no clear-cut issue on which to break away. Even to-day, we can only point out what the Congress has failed to do. We cannot object to the Congress in theory, for its ideals are much the same as ours."

This was an odd stand for the Socialists to take. It does not appear to be sufficiently decisive an attitude to attract those who were dissatisfied with the Congress. The Socialists' only complaint against the Congress was that the principles on which the Congress was founded were not being put into effect, and that with the coming of freedom the control of the Congress party had passed into the hands of capitalist interests rather than those which represented the people.

Membership of the Congress was strictly on an individual basis, Jai Prakash explained. There was no organizational membership as in the case of trade unions which formed an intrinsic part of the British Labour party. When a party man in the Congress did not live up to its principles there was no organization behind him which would take him to task. The Socialists were, therefore, planning to have organizational membership for their party.

But all these ideas appeared too fine for the understanding of the broad masses of the Indian people who still go to the electoral polls and put a cross against a picture of a bull

or an elephant, being too illiterate to read even the name of the candidate for whom they are voting.

The people seemed to understand the language of symbols and flags as being the only language of politics. In the old days there was the Congress flag of saffron, white and green with the spinning-wheel in the centre. It stood for *swaraj* as opposed to the Union Jack in red, white and blue, which stood for the British *raj* and its oppression. Now there was no longer a Congress party flag, for that old flag, with the slight alteration in the wheel, had become the flag of the nation, the flag of the government, the flag which fluttered over the same police offices which still mowed the people down.

So if the people did not want to vote for the Congress, they could not vote for that flag.

Therefore, a new flag was needed for which they could vote—a flag which stood out in clear colours, symbolizing an opposition to the rule of those who were fast following in the footsteps of former administrations. The opposition had to be clear and decisive and not dependent on the negative qualities of the Congress. The masses could not be expected to understand the difference between the programme laid down by the National Planning Committee and the economic policies of the government. They could only understand that in spite of freedom their stomachs were now emptier than before; that they had to queue up for long hours for a miserable ration of inferior rice; that potatoes, sugar and vegetables could not be regular items in their diet; that they had even less to wear than before. They also saw that even worse than their own plight was that of thousands of the refugees who had nothing in the world to call their own and who were beginning to feel unwanted in their own land and deserted by their own people.

More than anything else, the people were beginning to feel that their energy to fight for survival and existence had been sapped. They no longer knew who was on the opposite side, for the government and the police of to-day were, they were told, of the land and of the people.

The Socialist party certainly threw no clear light on the day-to-day problems which confronted the people: how to get a handful more rice; how to buy a few more vegetables;

how to find milk which was unadulterated with water and how to make their few rupees go as far as they used to go. Their flag, though red, had a wheel and a plough on it. No one spoke of it as the Red flag because that was the flag of the Communists and known the world over.

While the Socialist party was fighting for a seat in the dress circle of Indian politics, discussing high level economic planning and constitutional opposition and the finer points of parliamentary debate, the Communists came in waving the real Red flag—the one with its hammer and sickle—to attract the people.

Theirs was no fight for principles and methods of procedure. They were launching the beginnings of a class war. They promised the people a redistribution of wealth and however little the people could actually hope to get it would still be more than they had. The Communists did not talk of constitutional opposition or of getting power democratically. They believed and preached that the end justified the means and that, in view of the Congress entrenching itself behind vested interests, the only way to get power for the people was to take it, violently or non-violently, whichever way it came easiest.

This clear-cut enunciation of their objective, however wrong it was democratically or morally, was more understandable by the masses and made a more direct appeal to the people. The Red flag was anti the Congress-sheltered black-marketeer, anti the employer who grabbed the profits of their labour as in the old days. It was also anti the government which seemed to be making their lives harder instead of easier; and it was anti all those men who, still wearing Gandhi caps and *khaddar* clothes, rode past them in large limousines, in the so-called service of the people.

This was the gospel which the Communists preached. It naturally appealed to those who felt they had been betrayed by the Congress.

Communism in India traces its origin to a handful of well-educated Indians whose basic foundation in politics was also laid in the Congress itself. Impatient with the pace at which the non-violent movement of Mahatma Gandhi was moving, they craved for the introduction into the Indian political struggle of the full-blooded methods of the October

revolution which had so quickly swept away the long and oppressive tyranny of the Tzars. Smarting as they did under the harsh British régime, in a land where their people had been made to feel the bitter humiliation of being a subject race, these Communists believed that the non-violent process of passive resistance would not bring freedom within their lifetime. They were, therefore, willing to gamble for quicker results by using methods to which Mahatma Gandhi would not agree.

As far back as 1924 some young men had formed a nebulous leftist group out of which later grew the Communist party of India. Prominent among these founder members were Mirajkar, Dange, Nimkar and Adhikari. The last-named was a German-educated doctor who had specialized in physics and chemistry. In Europe he had got swept away by this fascinating Soviet theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of a co-operative way of living, of an equality of opportunity, and by the five year plans which could promise so much and achieve so much for the have-nots of the land.

About the year 1929 this group had begun to attract a lot of young men to its ranks, chiefly students to whom this new gospel of Lenin and Marx made a quick appeal. The British-controlled government of India, realizing that this growing trend of thought should be nipped in the bud, effected an all-India round up of these extreme leftists, the majority of whom were Communists. They were charged with sedition. There followed the famous Meerut trial, where crystallization took place for the first time and the vague term "leftist" gave place to the more definite designation of "Communist".

The original fight of Communism in India was, therefore, against Britain, the imperial power. Although the early schooling of these "foundation members" of the Indian Communist party was in the Congress, they formed very soon a completely distinct group with an ideology of its own—an ideology based on a difference of method as far as the political fight went at that moment. Inasmuch as the Congress and the Communists both wanted to overthrow the same paramount power they ran side by side in their objective if not in their methods.

The Communists next came to the forefront at the time

of the Cawnpore[1] conspiracy case, in which two of the more prominent leaders were Dange and Ajay Kumar Ghose. About the same time there was a terrorist group operating from Bengal which had no real affiliation with the Communists but which, in its own way, was closely allied to the Communists in methods and ideology. This group of terrorists was rounded up after the Chittagong armoury raid, and most of its members were sentenced to long terms of imprisonment in the Andaman Islands, to which "lifers" were usually sent. There, during their long imprisonment, they studied the doctrine of Marx and when they came out between 1940 and 1942, instead of being mere terrorists, became full-fledged Communists, ready to join the now-better-organized Communist party.

The small group of early Communists which formed the brains trust of Communism in India has proved itself capable of careful long-range planning and an infinite capacity for endurance and sacrifice, and now, at the age of forty-five approximately, its members are the leaders of Communism in India. Three new names soon came to the forefront in the party. They were P. C. Joshi, now suspended because he proved to be a reformist rather than a revolutionary, Sunderaiya, who came from the province of Andhra, and Randive, a first-class honours student of the University of Bombay, who has to his credit a brilliant thesis on the population problem of India. Likewise, Joshi had got a first in his Master of Arts exam and was for several years the main prop of the party, its most efficient organizer, who had successfully consolidated the different groups within the party which did not see eye to eye in the early stages.

Sunderaiya's work was noticeable in Andhra, a large area between Madras and Hyderabad, where the Communists successfully spread their influence over the very militant agricultural class peculiar to this part of India. Sunderaiya and Gopalan were originally staunch Congress workers in that district. As the rank and file of the Congress in Andhra grew dissatisfied, they turned left and joined the Socialist group in the Congress. The Socialists boasted of their hold over this province, only to find that the organization was Socialist in name alone and that, to all intents and purposes,

[1] Now written "Kanpur".

it was a Communist organization. Jai Prakash Narayan, therefore, after his visit to that area, was compelled to disown the "Andhra Socialists", who, somewhere around 1938/39, officially joined the Communist party.

The headquarters of the Communist party is in Bombay, perhaps because of the larger concentration of industrial workers in that city than in any other. It was in Bombay that they first opened their own press and printed their party paper, the *People's Age*. Bombay handled propaganda and policy, for it was here that they found the quickest response from industrial labour, from the millhands of the large textile area, north of the city.

The well-known methods of Communist infiltration were most easily put into effect in these areas, for it was not difficult to foment industrial unrest, promote strikes and effect sabotage when the workers were so thoroughly dissatisfied. The key party men could operate to greater advantage in this thickly populated district of malcontents.

But gradually Communism spread, not only to the larger cities of India, but to some agricultural areas as well, where indigenous peasant movements were in the making. The peasant party was called the *Kisan Sabha, Kisan* meaning peasants and *Sabha* meaning conference. The *Kisan Sabha* was put on its feet by men who were not Communists but who had been disillusioned by the methods of the Congress. But while the men at the top, the chief organizers, were not Communists, the men who rallied around them, the base workers, were active Communists, with the result that the *Kisan Sabha* virtually became an organization influenced, if not dominated, by the Communist party of India.

The high spots of the *Kisan* movement were the uprisings of the Warlis in the province of Bombay, at Telengana in Hyderabad State, and at Debhaga in Bengal. Refusal to pay taxes, resistance to authority and attempts to oust the landlord were the main features of these uprisings, which, although they have been curbed, have had great emotional and political value.

The Communist hold over the workers and the peasants is, however, a bit loosely woven. For instance, while the Warlis are firmly in their grasp, the Communists have had no effect whatsoever on the peasantry of the adjoining pro-

vince of Gujerat, which still swears by the Congress, in spite of their famines, and where Sardar Vallabbhai Patel is still the uncrowned king.

The Communist influence is most noticeable among the low-grade workers in textiles, the railways, among students and in general industries as, for instance, in the rubber companies of Bombay and the transport services of Calcutta. Much has depended upon the enthusiasm of base workers and the area from which they have come.

The Socialists have a better hold on the middle classes, the clerical staff, the better-off workers in mills and factories.

While the Communists are small as an organization compared to the vast nation-wide resources of the Congress, their leaders form a closely-knit, well-regimented group, ready to take orders and carry out to the letter detailed instructions from their nominated superiors. They are known to live together, work together and share their material resources, and generally to subjugate the interests of the individual to those of the party. Above all, they have been proved capable of maintaining absolute secrecy about themselves and their work. They do not even wish to probe for information which is denied to them by the party, for they know that their existence and their strength depend entirely on the secrecy they maintain.

Up till 1943 the party workers received no pay, but thereafter full-time workers received about Rs. 40 a month. I know of two young Cambridge-educated men whose brains and whole energies are at the disposal of their party and who work long hours each day, in return for which they draw, without complaint, the paltry sum which the party has sanctioned for them. In order to solve their immediate economic problem the Communists have run communes where food is available to them very cheaply, but in general they try to depend on friends and sympathizers for a meal and often for clothes. When a Communist worker marries, he gets a slight increase in his allowance, and so also when he has a child.

Organizationally, the Communist party has grown between the years 1942 and 1946. Then, because of the support they offered to the Allied war effort, the British tried to use the Communist to offset the non-co-operation of the

Congress who resisted the idea that India should participate in the war. The Communist support of the war can be traced to two reasons; one, Soviet Russia was fighting on the Allied side, and two, it was an ideal opportunity for field work in India when the large majority of the Congress workers were interned.

Sometimes natural causes have helped the Communists. For instance, Bengal is always ripe for violence, for the Bengalis have already had the experience of launching terrorist movements in the past. Bengali blood can be easily stirred when given the opportunity and the promise to right their wrongs. It comes more naturally to a Bengali to throw a bomb and explode a factory than for a sleepy Maharatta on the Western Ghats. Moreover, underground activity had always been known to thrive in the hotbeds of Bengal, even from the earliest days of political agitation. Likewise at Telengana, where the Communists launched a major offensive using the peasant for the uprising instead of the industrial worker, there was already the unquestionable feudalism of the old Nizam, which was accepted as an anachronism in democratic India. It was easy, therefore, to show up black against white.

In some districts it is, on the other hand, more difficult for the Communists to get a foothold. For instance, in the south, the cold, calculating Madrasi, always too preoccupied with his personal interests, his emoluments, increment and betterment, does not too easily fall for this dangerous philosophy of living in which personal sacrifices are involved, even though the promise is given that under a Communist régime there will be a more equitable redistribution of wealth. But on the south coast, in Malabar, there are the Moplahs, who are uneducated fanatics. These would be easy converts to an uprising, largely because they naturally respond to agitation.

The Indian Communists flatly deny the influence of Moscow and the Kremlin over them. But the denial should not be taken too seriously. No Communist would be so foolish as to admit any complicity with the master organization, the Politburo. The British had made it very difficult for Soviet agents to operate in India. Only since freedom, with a number of new Soviet or Soviet-controlled embassies

springing up in the country, has it been possible for Moscow to have some real contact with her Indian comrades. The route of operations has been through south-east Asia and Burma, using the oversize embassy at Bangkok as the base for operations. The method is a new one; outwardly they are only fostering cultural relations. Our Indian leaders too often and too easily fall for this culture-promoting idea and find out only too late the real *motif* behind the conferences attended by key men in the Communist network.

The only known instance of the Soviets trying to help the Indian Communist party with funds was first mentioned in *March*. On that occasion a certain gentleman was trying to sell newsprint from the South Sakhalin Islands. The Indian police, who have a Special branch which is said to be "vigilant", were completely unaware of this and only after the news item had appeared in our paper did a Secret Service official call on me, pathetically asking me, a newspaperman, for particulars. The Communist idea on this occasion was that the monies raised from the innocent sale of newsprint would remain in India to help Communist propaganda here.

Since independence, there has been no great change noticeable in the organizational strength of the Indian Communist party. Its active workers are estimated at 70,000, but nobody really knows how large the Communist Party of India is. Its cardholders may not be many but its power to foment and capitalize on labour unrest is terrific. In this general influence exercised by the Communist party there is a marked increase noticeable.

The reason is obvious. The Congress, which was once the spearhead of the opposition to the government, has now become the government itself. Its policy since freedom has borne no resemblance whatsoever to that revolutionary or democratic Socialism to which it was pledged. It has, in fact, in the first two years of its assumption of power proved itself more reactionary, more intolerant, more corrupt, more capitalist and at times even more oppressive than the administration of the British.

The people as a whole now feel they have been betrayed by the Congress and therefore in search of champions for their fight for survival and for economic freedom—from

want and fear—they have to choose between the somewhat highbrow Socialist party of India, which is constantly stressing its points of similarity with the Congress, and the more crude, ruthless, but shrewd and calculating Communists, who are more openly and more dramatically opposing the Congress. In a choice between the pinks and the reds, the people whose stomachs have been too long empty, and who walk the streets and see the so-called "servants of the people" riding in highly polished limousines, are likely to choose the more vicious opposition to their new oppressors.

After all, the Communists did redistribute the land among the peasants, the people say, and that sort of subtle Communist propaganda goes a long way in a country where too many of the people have too long been landless.

The days seem over when the representatives of our government were to be seen naïvely trying to flirt with the strong silent men of the Kremlin, if only to pique our erstwhile British administrators. We no longer see in the Indian Press pictures of our U.N. representatives fraternizing with those of the Soviets. Even Mrs. Pandit, browned-off with the coolth of the Kremlin, is preferring to bask in the warmth of the White House.

The reason for this change in the attitude of the Nehru government is because of the situation which has developed at home, wherein, instead of our just being friendly with the Communists of another country, we are now having to face a growing Communist movement in our own land with its accompanying threat to the democratic republic at which, at least in theory, we are still aiming.

Strong right-wing supporters of the Congress, chief among whom is Mr. G. D. Birla, have been quick to see that their interest and security depend upon a closer alliance with capitalist and democratic countries like Great Britain and America, rather than with those behind the iron curtain. Mr. Birla and his kind still think of safety in the shape of gold bars and a police force, rather than in a well-planned Socialist economy, with the result that these right-wing supporters of the Congress, who undoubtedly have a great effect on our government's policy, have driven that government to combat the Communist menace by using methods which are undemocratic. Emergency powers and Public

Security Measures Acts have been used to round up Communists everywhere, to muzzle their Press and generally to put them out of circulation. In a country like India, trained for a quarter of a century to resent the use of undemocratic ways, this is the surest way of creating sympathy for the Communist cause. For, as the economic situation deteriorates more and more, the trend of working class opinion will be driven to support the Communist agitators, 70,000 of whom cannot be locked up indefinitely.

Quite recently the West Bengal Congress Prime Minister, Dr. B. C. Roy, revealed in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly that he "had been directed by the Centre to increase the police force because it would not be possible to call out the army in aid of the civil power". Dr. Roy admitted that the Communist menace "showed no signs of abating". This was strange, for none of these Congress ministers explained how a Communist menace came into existence, when, as Congressmen claimed, the people were solidly behind the Congress. Surely a handful of Communists could do very little without some measurable support from the people.

It also seems somewhat ironical that the very people who during the days of the British so strongly resented that Indian monies should be spent on defence expenditure and on the upkeep of an oppressive police force should now be increasing the expenditure on these same counts, especially when the people were so solidly behind the Congress. The Congress used to say that the very fact that the British depended on their police force to keep them in power proved that they did not govern India with the will of the people. It is difficult now, in view of these huge increases in expenditure, to maintain the contention that the people are still solidly behind the Congress. The truth is that in the name of defending the state and the government, one more attempt is being made to prop up the tottering influence of the Congress party with the aid of an armed police force.

In July 1948, over six months before the Communist menace became apparent to the great and knowledgeable leaders of the Congress, an open letter to Pandit Nehru over my signature appeared on the front page of my paper.

The theme of that letter was contained in its second headline: "IF THE CONGRESS DOES NOT CHANGE ITS PRESENT POLICY, INDIA WILL REGRETTABLY TURN COMMUNIST."

Looking at that back number, I find a few passages which it seems appropriate to quote now.

To Pandit Nehru I said:

"I belong to the generation of Indians who believe in you. With Mahatma Gandhi, you have been in the vanguard of our struggle from the earliest days. The faith you gave us younger men has brought us to where we are. To-day Mahatma Gandhi is no more and you alone remain to lead us out of the chaos in which we find ourselves. . . .

"Many of us have been dubbed as anti-Congress merely because, day in and day out, we are trying to urge the Congress back to the path of progress and democracy to which that party is pledged. But not one of the men in power to-day seems to pay any attention to what a large and articulate section of the people are saying. Some of our ministers in the provinces have at times tried to suppress this criticism in a most ruthless fashion.

"My fear is that if you, as the one outstanding living Indian of our generation, do not bring your influence to bear on the Congress to change this new and almost fascist policy which is being put into effect in the country, India will regrettably turn Communist.

"I utter this warning because, as a journalist, I am often able better to judge the mood and temper of our people than those who are tied up with the red tape of the administration.

"Many of us still believe that there is sufficient power in the Congress if *you* were to give it a clear and unequivocal lead to face the problems and responsibilities which have fallen on us since August last. But this lead must be clear and unfaltering; it must not pause to compromise with reactionary forces.

"These warnings which many of us have uttered through the last few months have unfortunately fallen on deaf ears. Provincial ministers, now bloated with power, do not appear to be in a mood to listen to the voice of the people. But as sure as the day follows the night, if this new policy of *ruling* our people, of installing on the ashes of the British *raj* a new Indian despotism, is persisted in, our people with their

long experience of fighting repression will surely turn over to whatever party is most opposed to the Congress.

"Socialism and the Socialist party in India appear to me to be making too intellectual an appeal to our masses. They also lack organization, and the constitutional opposition which they are attempting to offer the Congress is both feeble and ineffective. They are, moreover, being pushed off the sidewalks of politics by political *goondas*[1] who have now appeared in the Congress.

"While our people cannot understand the subtleties of Socialism and its principles, they easily understand the meaning of the red flag with the hammer and the sickle. To them these symbols mean power for the people, even though it is not so. But much as we may try to convince them that Communism as it exists to-day is only another form of dictatorship in which there is little place for the individual, at the standard of literacy at which our people are, they will swing back from the Congress into the arms of the Communist party. Do you wish that this should happen in India?"

That was in July 1948, and by March 1949 Congress Premiers and Home Ministers were bleating in the Assemblies for increased funds to build up their police force to counteract the "growing Communist menace".

I cannot help seeing to-day, as I saw in Chungking in 1942, the very much superior political effort that is being put out in India by some of the younger men of the Communist party with whom as a journalist I have sometimes come in touch. Their paper the *People's Age* may not be brilliant journalism, but, before it was banned, it was first-class propaganda. It was packed with stories of discontent among the workers and the peasants, stories of how, in the areas in which the Communists operated, they had brought about a strange unity among the people which transcended the barriers of caste, creed and economic inequality. The general lay-out and get-up of the paper, even though it was produced in difficult circumstances, was far superior to many of the papers which claimed to belong to the so-called nationalist Press. The reason was that the men who owned this nationalist Press were, since freedom, chiefly working it for profit.

[1] Anti-social elements.

The *People's Age* was a refreshing contrast to the group of papers recently started by Sardar Patel's son, Dayabhai, which were nothing but shoddy examples of journalistic degradation. Yet these latter papers had the support of some of the leading Congressmen of India and were, therefore, looked upon as semi-official organs of the Congress party. The difference between the Cambridge-educated young men on the staff of the now banned *People's Age* and the new Congress Press-lord, Dayabhai Vallabbhai Patel, was more glaring even than the difference I noticed between the young Communists of China and the effete class of Kuomingtang officials.

The writing on the wall is as clear in India to-day as it was in Chungking in 1942.

One of the main reasons why the Congress has not yet been replaced is because there is no political organization ready and large enough to take its place. Twenty-five years of service to India, during which Mahatma Gandhi groomed the India National Congress, cannot be too easily brushed aside by the millions of Indians who hope that the Congress can still mend its ways.

But its future is precarious. No political party can remain in office indefinitely merely by relying on its past record. While no one can predict with any certainty which way political thought and opinion will turn, when it turns away from the Congress, the danger is that this present totalitarian trend of the administration, following so closely on a hated British rule, will swing the people to the other extreme where Communists are ready and waiting to receive them.

A near-fascist state, proclaiming itself neutral, can hardly be expected to survive when all around our sub-continent the colour is changing to red.

XX

"WE, THE PEOPLE . . ."

THE WORDS OF THE preamble to our draft constitution read:

We, the people of India, solemnly resolve to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC, and to secure to all its citizens:
JUSTICE, social, economic and political;
LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
EQUALITY of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all
FRATERNITY, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the nation.

The record of the governments in India, both at the Centre and the provinces, in the two years that have followed the declaration of independence, has been a betrayal of these solemn resolutions.

Far from being a democratic republic, we have become a near-fascist state.

Economic and political justice can hardly be said to exist in a country:

when political opponents of the Congress are being detained for long periods without trial,

when emergency powers are being freely used for political purposes,

when the acts of the executive cannot be reviewed by the courts of law,

and when political détenus were, until recently, allowed access to their legal advisers only within hearing of a police official.

There can be no liberty of thought or expression in a country:

in which in peace time a newspaper editor can be compelled to print what the government wishes to have printed,

in which newspapers can be suppressed and suspended at the will of the executive,

and in which according to the unanimous resolution of the editors of all India, passed by them in open conference, emergency powers applicable to the Press *have been* abused by the government.

What freedom of the Press can exist in the country where the President of the Congress—the party which controls the government and professes to uphold the tradition of democracy—says: "The Press is now a unit of the government. Naturally it is less free than it was under the old bureaucratic government"?[1]

There can hardly be any equality of status or opportunity here in India:

where the friends and relations of the men in power have grabbed the plums of office,

where a large section of leading Congressmen are carrying on a brisk black-market trade in patriotism,

and when even the men in power are known to have used their public office for personal and political gain.

What dignity of the individual can there be when a man can be arrested without a warrant and without any reason being given for his arrest?

The facts speak for themselves.

This position is, however, not unalterable. In a democracy a people can change it by accepting the responsibilities of freedom, the foremost of which is not to submit passively to methods which are undemocratic but to strive actively, constitutionally and continually for change. As Mahatma Gandhi once said: "Be men, not mannikins."

Yet somehow our people, unaccustomed to behaving like free men, have long remained bewitched by the Congress. They have been inclined to follow a blind leadership, believing that sometime somewhere the Congress will find for them the freedom that was promised.

[1] Dr. Pittabhai Sitaramayya in March 1949.

Two years of Congress rule had not yet passed when there came to the people the realization that they had neither food nor freedom. Gradually their eyes were opened to the great betrayal which was taking place. They realized now that at the end of a quarter of a century of bitter sruggle against British imperialism they were being made to live in a near-fascist state which the Congress had built around them.

Then their drifting came abruptly to an end. This changed mood which overcame the country was reflected at two important by-elections, held in the middle of 1949, at which the people recorded in no uncertain terms their verdict against the Congress. They did not vote for any other party in particular; they just voted against the Congress.

The first of these by-elections was in May of 1949, held in Byculla, a district of Bombay. It was a three-cornered fight between a Socialist, an "Untouchable" and a Congress nominee. They finished in that order, shattering Congress prestige beyond repair.

Sub-editors of Congress dailies were hard put to find heading types small enough to play down this crushing defeat. Defeat at the hands of the able Socialist lawyer, Purshottam Tricumdas, who topped the poll, was not surprising. The verdict was justified on his personal merit. The surprise was rather in the margin of his victory and in the fact that an electioneering campaign, conducted personally by the top party bosses of the local Congress, assisted by two provincial ministers, had failed. The Congress nominee was defeated even by an obscure representative of the Scheduled Class, formerly known as an Untouchable. The Congressman last, a poor last.

Aspects of that high-powered electioneering campaign indicate that the Congress party, still relying on its pristine glory, had made an issue of this election. One of the ministers embroiled in the election had said: "The Congress fought for freedom. . . . It has always lived and lives up to the ideals of democracy. None can deny that it has been holding the reins of the administration of this country with credit. It is the habit of various parties to level baseless criticisms at the policies of the Congress governments. But let

me tell you that [Congress] governments are following such policies as would be beneficial to the masses—the common men of this nation. I would, therefore, appeal to you to support the Congress and help consolidate the freedom of this country."

The "common men" apparently did not believe this Congress minister.

Another minister stepped into the electioneering arena and said: "There is no party or group of people more anxious than the [Congress] government to strengthen the freedom of this land, and in order that our country may come to the forefront it is the duty of every citizen to support the Congress. . . ."

The voters did not believe him either.

On the day of the election, Congress House issued an appeal to the voters which was front-paged in the Congress-supporting Press. It said: DO YOUR DUTY AND HELP STRENGTHEN NEHRU'S GOVERNMENT.

The Congress, therefore, had made this by-election an issue of a vote of confidence. As the *Times of India* said: "It is in that context that they must now accept the adverse verdict of the electors."[1]

The challenge of the Congress had, therefore, been taken up by the people and answered.

It must not be inferred from the result of this election that the electorate had overnight turned Socialist. They had merely turned away from the Congress. The *Free Press Journal,* known for its pro-Congress sympathies, explained the election result by saying: "The answer is that the Congress has failed to live up to its promises. That brands the Congress as a breaker of faith."

In South Calcutta, west Bengal, the Congress suffered an even more shattering defeat a month later. This was a four-cornered fight, but the only two candidates who mattered were Sarat Chandra Bose (mentioned earlier in this book) who stood as an Independent, and Suresh Chandra Das, the official Congress nominee.

To this electioneering campaign was brought not only the full weight of the party organization but the weight of the national leaders as well, including Pandit Nehru and

[1] April 29th, 1949.

Sardar Patel. The Congress believed that Byculla had been lost because of defective provincial leadership, but that with the top men in the country asking for a vote of confidence the people would return a very different verdict.

The miscalculation of the Congress with regard to its power and hold over the people was proved when Sarat Bose, the anti-Congress, Independent candidate, romped home an easy winner. His majority over the Congressman who stood against him was 4 to 1. The Congress defeat was further aggravated by the fact that Bose did no electioneering at all. He was not even present in Calcutta at the time and was in Switzerland for reasons of health. The people did the campaigning for him; they elected him in his absence.

This second defeat shook the Congress to its roots. The *Nation*, which was Sarat Bose's paper, prophesied: THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

The South Calcutta by-election had a deeper and more frightening significance. While Bose was no Communist, it was a combination of anti-Congress and Communist elements that had elected him. The Communists had shrewdly taken advantage of the situation to distribute truck-loads of their party literature, some of which incited people to violence and murder. According to a newspaper report,[1] "One of the pamphlets asked the people to wipe out the Congress leaders and chop to pieces the present ministers."

Communist-backed workers in several well-known industrial concerns made a bold bid to take over control of the factories in which they worked by force of arms. Workers of the Bengal Pottery Company Ltd. were foiled in such an attempt but not before the police had fought a four-hour battle with them. Inside the motor workshop of Messrs. Allen and Berry, a Dalmia-Jain concern, the workers entered the premises as usual early in the morning and, once inside, barricaded themselves in, holding the officers as hostages. For nine days they held the place, made bombs, shells and hand-grenades and threatened to blow up the place should the police resort to force. Then, when the factory's ration shop appeared to be running out of food, they slipped out in ones and twos early on the tenth morning, evading the

[1] *Free Press Journal.*

slackened watch and making the police appear completely ludicrous.

Several other factories had a similar experience. During those hectic days, arms and ammunition were found by the police in the most unexpected places and, when challenged, the culprits did not hesitate to use them.

West Bengal was, as I said earlier, selected as an experimental ground for a possible Communist revolution. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the incidents following the South Calcutta by-election were the early manifestations of that experiment.

I do not want Communism to come to my country, because I believe that it will enslave my people once again and make them the serfs of yet another foreign power, Soviet Russia. But I am equally convinced that the present policy of the Congress of harbouring *khaddar*-clad, Gandhi-capped crooks and black-marketeers, of ruling this country regardless of all principles of democracy, and of attempting to perpetuate a one-party rule smothering all legitimate, constitutional and democratic opposition will make this country ripe for a Communist uprising.

There is still plenty of reserve in the Congress to combat this red rash which breaks out spasmodically over India. There are plenty of honest men still to be found in the country, but, unless they come forward now, we shall surely head for bankruptcy and chaos.

Such is my picture of India two years after liberation—a picture about which our Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, said we should not be "unduly pessimistic"!

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